

CONTENTS

Abbreviations	viii
Author's Preface	xi
Introduction	xiii
1 The Event of the <i>Ḥadīth</i>	1
1.1 the Meaning of <i>Ḥadīth</i>	1
1.2 <i>Ḥadīth</i> and <i>Sunna</i>	2
1.3 The Importance of the <i>Ḥadīth</i>	2
1.4 Assembling the <i>Ḥadīth</i>	6
1.5 The <i>Muwatta'</i>	7
1.6 The Legal and Historical Traditions	8
1.7 Classification of <i>Ḥadīth</i> Texts	9
2 The Companions	14
2.1 'Companion' Defined	14
2.2 The Number of the Companions	14
2.3 The Companion-Narrators	15
2.4 The Scrupulousness of the Companions	23
2.5 The Controversy over <i>Kitāba</i>	24
3 After the Companions	28
3.1 The Successors	28
3.2 The Traditionists' Attitude to <i>Ḥadīth</i>	29
3.3 The Crisis of Authenticity	31
3.4 Critical Traditionists	36
3.5 The Science of <i>Rijāl</i> Develops	38
3.6 Travelling (<i>Rihla</i>) in Search of <i>Ḥadīth</i>	40
4 Categories of <i>Ḥadīth</i> Collections	43
4.1 Beginnings	43
4.2 The <i>Musnads</i>	44
4.2a The <i>Musnad</i> of al-Ṭayālīsī	44
4.2b The <i>Musnad</i> of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal	46
4.2c Other <i>Musnad</i> Works	52

4.3	<i>The Muṣannaf Works</i>	52
4.3a	<i>The Muṣannaf</i> of 'Abd al-Razzāq	52
4.3b	<i>The Muṣannaf</i> of Ibn Abī Shayba	53
4.3c	<i>The Ṣaḥīḥ</i> of al-Bukhārī	53
4.3d	<i>The Ṣaḥīḥ</i> of Muslim	58
4.4	<i>The Sunan Works</i>	61
4.4a	<i>The Sunan</i> of Abū Daūd	61
4.4b	<i>The Jāmi'</i> of al-Tirmidhī	64
4.4c	<i>The Sunan</i> of al-Nasā'ī	67
4.4d	<i>The Sunan</i> of al-Dārimī	68
4.4e	<i>The Sunan</i> of Ibn Māja	69
4.4f	<i>The Sunan</i> of al-Dāraquṭnī	70
4.4g	<i>The Sunan</i> of al-Bayhaqī	71
4.4h	<i>The Sunan</i> of Sa'īd ibn Manṣūr	71
4.4i	<i>The Sunan</i> of Abū Muslim al-Kashshī	71
4.5	<i>The Mu'jam Works</i>	72
4.6	Ranking of <i>Hadīth</i> Collections	73
5	Some Special Features of the Literature	76
5.1	<i>The Isnād</i> System	74
5.2	Academic Procedures	84
5.3	Scholars and the State	89
6	The Biographical Dictionaries	91
6.1	<i>Asmā' al-Rijāl</i>	92
6.1a	General Works	96
6.1b	<i>The Ṭabaqāt</i> of Ibn Sa'd	96
6.1c	<i>The Kitāb al-Tārikh</i> of al-Bukhārī	100
6.1d	<i>Al-Jarḥ wa'l-Ta'dīl</i> of al-Rāzī	100
6.2	Dictionaries of Particular Classes	101
6.2a	Biographical Dictionaries	101
6.2b	Dictionaries of the Narrators	103
6.2c	<i>The History of Baghdad</i>	103
6.2d	<i>The History of Damascus</i>	104
6.2e	Other Local Collections	105
7	The Disciplines of Formal Criticism	107
7.1	<i>ʿIlm Riwāyat al-Ḥadīth</i>	108
7.2	<i>ʿIlm al-Jarḥ wa'l-Ta'dīl</i>	109
7.3	Legal Significance of Traditions	110
7.4	<i>Matn</i> Analysis and Criticism	113

APPENDIX I: Women in *Ḥadīth* Scholarship 117

APPENDIX II: The *Ḥadīth* and Orientalism 124

APPENDIX III: The Leiden edition of Ibn Sa'd 136

Notes 139

Works Cited 159

Index 167

ABBREVIATIONS

- EI *Encyclopedia of Islam* (First edition)
EI² *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New edition)
COPL *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the
Oriental Public Library at Bankipore*
IC *Islamic Culture*
IQ *The Islamic Quarterly*
IS *Islamic Studies*
JASB *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*
JRAS *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
MW *The Muslim World*
SI *Studia Islamica*
ZDMG *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS short book exists in order to present to the English-reading public, non-Muslim as well as Muslim, the viewpoint of mainstream Islam with regard to the *Ḥadīth* literature, its origins and evolution, and its criticism by the Muslim doctors. While a number of works on the topic are now available in European languages, several of these represent Orientalist approaches to scholarship which are directed only to a small circle of academics,* while many of the others fail to give the reader an understanding of the normative Muslim viewpoint. Almost all recent studies, moreover, have failed to deal adequately with modern scholarship carried out in the Muslim world itself.

In assembling this book, use has been made not only of contemporary academic works, but also of many original Arabic sources some of which—to the author's knowledge—have not until now been fully utilised. Even the specialist reader, therefore, may perhaps find in this book some important material which may not be available to him or her in any of the conventional European works on the subject.

Some parts of the book have already been published: in *The Proceedings*

*For some recent investigations of the Orientalist phenomenon, see in particular R. Olson, A. Hussein and J. Qureishi, *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists* (Brambleboro, 1984CE); E. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978CE); A. Abdel Malek, 'L'orientalisme en crise', *Diogenes*, XLIV (1964CE), 130-40; H. Djait, *Europe and Islam: Cultures and Modernity* (Berkeley, 1985CE), 16-20, 42-73. Note also the (sometimes excessively intense) remarks of the Palestinian diaspora scholar A. Tibawi in his article 'English Speaking Orientalists: A critique of their approach to Islam and Arab nationalism', *MW* LIII (1963CE), 185-204, and reprinted in *IQ* VIII (1964CE), 23-45, 73-88, and published as a monograph (London, 1384/1964). Tibawi later produced a 'Second Critique of English-Speaking Orientalists and their Approach to Islam and the Arabs', *IQ* XXIII (1979CE), 3-54, which was likewise reprinted as a monograph in London in 1979. Arabic readers may also refer to the copious introduction and comments to the Arabic translation of the second edition of *The Legacy of Islam*, published as *Turāth al-Islām* (Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Literature and the Arts, 1398). Critiques of Orientalist views on *Ḥadīth* may be found in the two books of M. M. Azami: *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature* (Indianapolis, 1978CE); and *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Islamic Texts Society, 1993CE); also the work of the Turkish scholar M. Fuat Sezgin: *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, volume 1 (Leiden, 1967CE), and his *Buhārī'nin Kaynakları hakkında araştırmalar* (Istanbul, 1956CE); cf also Muḡafā al-Sibā'i, *al-Sunna wa-Makānatuha fi'l-Tashrī' al-Islāmī* (Cairo, 1381), 365-420. Also to be consulted are the works of certain dissident Orientalists such as J. Horowitz, N. Abbott, and J. Robson, set forth in the list of Works Cited at the end of this book. Appendix II of the present work provides a brief assessment of the main Orientalist works in our field. [Editor.]

of the All-India Oriental Conference (1937), pp.187-206; and in the *Proceedings* of the Idāra-yi Ma'ārif-i Islāmiya (Lahore, 1933), pp.61-71; while an Arabic translation of Chapter 5 was published as part of *al-Mabāḥith al-'Ilmiyya* at the Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif of Hyderabad in 1939.

In 1959, the University Grants Commission of India, together with Calcutta University, provided the necessary funds for the book's publication. I would be failing in my duty if I did not express my gratitude to them for this favour, and likewise to Dr. G. C. Raychaudhury, Registrar of Calcutta University, for his sympathy and keen interest in the publication of this book. I should also express my heart-felt thanks to Dr. S. A. Kamali, a young competent scholar of Arabic, well trained in the modern methods of literary research, who very kindly checked the references in the book. Thanks are also due to Dr. M. W. Mirza of Lucknow, who translated from Turkish a passage from an article by Professor Ahmed Ateş; to Mawlana Mukhtar Ahmad Nadwi, a keen and critical student of *Ḥadīth*, who located for me a number of references to *Ḥadīth* works, and also Hajji Muhammad Yusuf, who are respectively Librarian and owner of the Hajji 'Abdallah Library, Calcutta, for lending me books from their library.

Finally, let me add that if this book stimulates a more active interest in *Ḥadīth* literature and Islamic culture amongst young Muslim scholars of Arabic and Islam, I will consider my long years of research to have been amply rewarded.

M.Z.S.

INTRODUCTION

THE history of the origin, development and criticism of *ḥadīth* literature is a subject as important as it is fascinating.

It is important because it serves as an astonishingly voluminous source of data for the history of pre-Islamic Arabia and of early Islam, and for the development of Arabic literature, as well as of Islamic thought in general and Islamic law in particular. It also played a decisive role in establishing a common cultural framework for the whole Islamic world,¹ and continues to wield substantial influence on the minds of the Muslim community;[†] an influence which, it seems clear, will continue for the foreseeable future. It is fascinating because it sheds so much light on the psychology of the *ḥadīth* scholars—the Traditionists—the devoutly scrupulous as well as the confirmed forgers, and on many of the key political and cultural movements which germinated and developed in the various regions of the Muslim world throughout its complex history. It portrays a brilliant medieval academic world which gave birth to many European scholarly institutions, including the doctorate and the baccalaureate.[§] It also contains many of the basic ideas now current about democracy, justice among mankind and nations, the condemnation of aggression, and the ideal of global peace. All this, moreover, is linked resolutely to the sacred, to a consciousness of man's exalted meaning and destiny, which seems to mark the Muslims out today more than ever before.

The Muslims (since the Blessed Prophet's lifetime), and European orientalist scholars (for about the last two hundred years), have hence paid close attention to *ḥadīth* and to its ancillary sciences. During the time of the Prophet, the Companions were zealous to learn and recall his words and the incidents of his life. Many of them wrote these '*ḥadīths*' down, and distributed them for the benefit of their co-religionists. A large number of *ḥadīths* were thus collected in the first century of Islam, and were disseminated throughout the vast Islamic empire, partly in writing,

^{*}As has been shown by J. Fück, 'Die Rolle des Traditionalismus im Islam', ZDMG xciii (1939 CE), 1-32.

[†]Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam* (Oxford, 1924 CE), 6.

[§]G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges* (Edinburgh, 1982 CE); R. Y. Ebeid and M. J. L. Young, 'New Light on the Origin of the Term "Baccalaureate"', IQ xviii (1974 CE), 3-7.

and partly as an extensive oral tradition. During the subsequent centuries, efforts were made to compile more or less exhaustive collections of *ḥadīths* which were considered to be reliable by specific scholarly criteria, and long and arduous journeys were undertaken for this purpose. Thus, partly in the second century after the Prophet's emigration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina, but largely in the third, important collections of such *ḥadīth* were compiled and published. As some *ḥadīth* were known to have been forged—some even during the Prophet's lifetime—immense care had to be taken to ensure their credentials. To this end, the Muslim scholars introduced the system of the *isnād*, the chain of authorities reaching back to the Prophet which shows the historical status of a report. This was introduced at an early date, and by the first quarter of the second century was treated as a necessary part of every tradition. In time, too, branches of literature grew up to serve as foundations for the criticism of every individual *ḥadīth*. As the *isnād* alone was not considered to be a sole and sufficient guarantee of a *ḥadīth*'s genuineness, a number of other general principles were laid down as litmus tests for the authenticity of a text. It has hence been generally accepted by the traditionists that the validity of a tradition is sufficiently determined by the rigorous techniques of criticism which have thus been developed by the specialists. All these matters have been touched upon in this book.

Finally, the reader should note that no attempt has been made in this book to deal with the Shī'ī traditions, for the author does not consider himself qualified to undertake such a task.

I

THE EVENT OF THE ḤADĪTH

I. I THE MEANING OF ḤADĪTH

THE Arabic word *ḥadīth* has the primary connotation of 'new', being used as an antonym of *qadīm*, 'old'. From this derived the use of the word for an item of news, a tale, a story or a report—be it historical or legendary, true or false, moral or scandalous, relating to the present or to the past. The word was employed in this sense by the pre-Islamic poets, and by the Qur'ān and the Prophet. Storytellers, also, were called *ḥuddāth*: the purveyors of *ḥadīth*.

This general sense of the word has, as elsewhere in the Arabic lexicon (e.g. *ṣalāt*, *sujūd*, *zakāt*, *taqwā*), been altered under the far-reaching influence of Islam. Since the lifetime of the Prophet himself the Muslims called reports which spoke of his actions and sayings 'the best *ḥadīth*', and, in due course, the word became increasingly confined to such reports.

Not only his Companions, but the Prophet himself appears to have used the term in this sense. When he remarked to Abū Hurayra that he knew his anxiety about *ḥadīth*,¹ he was referring to his own *ḥadīth*. Similarly, 'Utba had the Prophetic *ḥadīth* in mind when he commented that Ibn 'Abbās related only two or three *ḥadīths* in a month.² 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb meant the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet when he asked his companions not to narrate too many *ḥadīths*.³ When 'Alī instructed, 'When you write down the *ḥadīth*, write it with the *isnād*,' he was referring particularly to the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet.⁴

1.2 ḤADĪTH AND SUNNA

Closely connected to the word *ḥadīth* is the term *sunna*, which, although originally bearing the sense of 'precedent' and 'custom',⁵ and used thus in sixteen places in the Qur'ān,⁶ was employed by the Muslims for the accepted practice of the community, and, in later years, for the practice of the Prophet only.⁷ Some Muslim writers have regarded these philologically unconnected words as wholly synonymous, while others have attempted to draw distinctions between their connotations.⁸ Such distinctions, however, have long been theoretical.

1.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ḤADĪTH

Ḥadīth, thus defined, has been the subject of the closest interest among the Muslims since the lifetime of the Prophet. His astonishing career could not have failed to capture the undivided attention of those around him.⁹ Having lived a quiet, uneventful life for some forty years, he began one of history's most stirring and transformative movements, which successfully and forever changed the course of human thought and life. At the very beginning of his career as a prophet he struck fearlessly at the root of the firm beliefs and ancient customs of the pagan Arabs. In response, they hated and boycotted him, insulted and injured him, and forced him to leave his home for a distant city. But through his faith in his cause, his tenacity of purpose and the appeal of the simple monotheism he preached, he succeeded in overturning the established prestige of the Quraysh of Mecca, and then returned triumphantly within ten years of his exile, having founded a polity which was destined to measure sword simultaneously and successfully with the well-equipped and trained legions of Persia and Byzantium, and indelibly to influence history and culture down to the present.

The Prophet Muḥammad, then, has probably been the most influential single figure of world history. With his spiritual charisma, his straightforward honesty, the eloquence of the book which he brought, and the revolutionary effects of his activities, the eyes of friend and enemy alike were riveted upon him, noting his every act and statement.

To his enemies, he was a revolutionary bent upon destroying the whole fabric of their society, whose activities had to be keenly watched if the progress of his mission was to be suppressed. His words must have been the focus for endless reflection, conversation and heated discussion. They watched his movements so closely and carefully that many of his most

secretly conceived plans could not escape their watchful eyes. Abū Lahab, one of their most committed leaders, would go to him when he preached his faith to the Arabian tribes, and try to dissuade them from paying any heed to his peaceful sermons.¹⁰ They discovered his plans when his followers were migrating from Arabia to Abyssinia, sending men after them to try and bring about their forced return.¹¹ They found out that he was secretly speaking to the people of Medina, and they threatened the Medinans with hostility and violence if they continued their friendship with him.¹²

If his enemies took a close interest in his statements and actions, then the interest of his followers was more intense still. They had accepted him as their sole guide and prophet, identifying themselves with him completely in his life for God and his struggle against the Quraysh and the other hostile tribes. Their destiny was bound up with the future of the faith which he had received. His success was theirs. All his actions served them as an ideal, and hence a precedent (*summa*); every word which he uttered was a law to them, while his moral choices, so different from those of their age, yet so immediate in their impartial wisdom, provided them with a system of personal and social virtue which they tried to follow as faithfully as they could.¹³ When he chose a golden ring for himself, his friends put one on also; and when he put it off, gave it away, and wore a silver one instead, they also emulated his example.¹⁴ If he rose at midnight and stood for hours in prayer, his friends wished to do the same, and he himself, fearful for their strength, had to bid them to stop.¹⁵ If he fasted continuously for more than a day, his followers would desire to do the same, and he would have to explain to them that he had his own additional duties which were not incumbent upon them.¹⁶ Zayd ibn Khālid spent a whole night at his door in order to watch him offer his night prayers.¹⁷ Nawwās ibn Samʿān stayed at Medina for a whole year to enquire from the Prophet what was virtue and what was vice.¹⁸ Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī observed carefully the length of time he remained standing during his afternoon prayers.¹⁹ Ibn ʿUmar even counted how many times he asked pardon of God in one sitting.²⁰

The Companions did not simply commit as many as they could of the Prophet's words to memory. Some of them collected them in written books known as *ṣaḥīfas*, which they would use as a basis for lectures, and which were later preserved by their families, and by the next generation of Muslims, the so-called 'Successors' (*tābīʿūn*).²¹ After the Prophet's death, when his Companions scattered throughout the new provinces, many of them, and many of the Successors, undertook lengthy and difficult journeys, courting poverty and various hazards, in order to learn and collect as many *ḥadīths* as they could.²² With the passage of time, they founded independent

scholarly disciplines which would help the community to understand the *ḥadīth* of their Prophet, and to assess its genuineness and source.

This activity has been interpreted as one of the most impressive and original scholarly accomplishments of history. The degree of rigour and perfection to which the Muslims brought the system of *isnād*, the vast literature of *asmā' al-rijāl* (names of narrators) which they created as an aid to the formal criticism of the Traditions, the literature on *uṣūl al-ḥadīth* which serves as an aid to their material criticism, and the literature on the *mawḍū'āt*, which deals with material forged and fabricated in the name of the Prophet, stands today as a remarkable literary and scholarly achievement.

So much veneration and respect did the Companions have for the Prophet that one of them collected some of his perspiration, which was said to have been 'sweeter than musk', and stipulated in his will that it should be sprinkled on his body before it was put into the grave.²³ Others preserved anything that had been touched by him, and used it as a miraculous cure for disease.²⁴ Still others presented their children to him for his blessing.²⁵

Given this intense devotion to the Prophet, inspired by his charisma, holiness and integrity, many Companions made a point of observing his life, and recording for posterity everything that they could. Thus Abū Hurayra kept his constant company for three years, sacrificing all worldly pursuits, in order to see and hear what the Prophet did and said,²⁶ and regularly devoted a period of time to fixing in his memory the words he had heard.²⁷ 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ physically wrote down everything he heard from the Prophet.²⁸ 'Āzib, when asked by Abū Bakr to deliver a message to al-Barā', did not leave his company until he had related to him what he and the Prophet had done when they came out of Mecca and were pursued by the Quraysh.²⁹ 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who was living at a distance from Medina and was unable to attend the Prophet every day, made an agreement with one of the Anṣār that they would be present with him on alternate days, and report to each other everything they saw and heard from him.³⁰ Those Companions who had not been physically present when the Prophet said or did anything made up the deficiency by asking of those who had been present, taking care to ensure the veracity of the intermediary source. In fact, it is said to have been a common practice among the friends of the Prophet that whenever any two of them met, one would enquire from the other whether there was any *ḥadīth* (i.e. news of the Prophet's acts and speech), and the other would tell him what he knew.³¹ An extension of this practice seems to have been in vogue among some Muslim scholars even so late as the end of the eighth century of the Hijra: for instance, we are told that one

Isma'īl 'Aqūlī of Baghdad met with an Ibrāhīm of Aleppo, and asked him, after exchanging the usual greetings, whether he knew any *ḥadīths*. The latter, in his response, recited some *ḥadīths* from the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, fully equipped with their *isnāds*.³²

The Prophet himself, conscious of his mortality, attached a good deal of importance to the knowledge of his own *ḥadīth*. He used to ask his Companions to make them as widely known as possible, and take care that nothing should be falsely attributed to him.³³ He encouraged his followers to acquire knowledge (i.e., of the Qur'ān and *Sunna*), and teach it to others.³⁴ The course of study which he prescribed for the People of the Porch (*aṣḥāb al-ṣuffa*), those ascetics who lived at a porch attached to his house, included the Qur'ān, the *Sunna*, and the art of writing.³⁵ When appointing state officials he gave preference to those who were learned in the *Sunna* as well as the Qur'ān. Such, for instance, was the case with the appointment of *imāms*³⁶ and *qāḍīs*, and was probably the case with other appointments also. And in an especially celebrated *ḥadīth*, he asked Mu'ādh, when the latter Companion was going out as governor of the Yemen, on what basis he would issue judgements. 'On the basis of the Qur'ān,' Mu'ādh replied. 'Suppose,' said the Prophet, 'that you do not find it in the Qur'ān?' 'Then on the basis of the *Sunna*,' answered Mu'ādh.³⁷

After the Prophet's death, which signalled the end of direct revelation, the importance of *ḥadīth* inevitably increased. As von Kremer puts it: 'The life of the Prophet, his discourses and utterances, his actions, his silent approval and even his passive conduct, constituted next to the Qur'ān the second most important source of law for the young Muslim empire.'³⁸ Von Kremer is right in his assessment of the importance of the *ḥadīths* as a source of Islamic law. In reality, however, the role played by *ḥadīth* in the evolution of Arabic literature is far broader than this, for the *ḥadīth*, together with the Qur'ān, have supplied the driving impetus for the creation of many branches of Arabic writing, such as history, geography, anthologies of ancient verse, and lexicography. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* provided the bedrock for all the intellectual and academic enterprises of the Arabs.

In this way, the *ḥadīth* literature originated in the early life of the Prophet of Islam, developed largely through his life, and spread simultaneously with the spread of Islam throughout the new Muslim dominions. The Muslim armies which conquered Syria, Palestine, Persia and Egypt included a large number of the Companions of the Prophet, who carried his *ḥadīth* with them wherever they went.³⁹ In particular, *ḥadīth* rapidly flourished in Medina, Mecca, Kūfa, Baṣra, Damascus, Fuṣṭāṭ, Ṣan'ā', and Merv.⁴⁰ Even the distant

lands of North Africa and Spain received the *ḥadīths* before the end of the first century.⁴¹ And to the east, the message of the Qur'ān and *Sunna* had been received by India even before the Islamic conquest of Sind towards the end of the first century.⁴²

1.4 ASSEMBLING THE ḤADĪTHS

During the first century of Islam, the *ḥadīths* which had spread in this way through the vast Muslim domains were preserved partly in writing (in the form of laws and letters dictated by the Prophet himself,⁴³ and as *ṣaḥīfas* ascribed to certain of his Companions),⁴⁴ and partly in the memories of those who had associated with him and observed his life. After his death, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (*regn.* 13–24AH/634–44CE) purposed to collect the *ḥadīth* together. He gave the matter his careful consideration for an entire month, invoking the help of God in coming to a decision, and seeking the advice of his companions. We are told, however, that he was obliged to give up this promising project, for fear that the Qur'ān would be neglected by the Muslims.⁴⁵

The Umayyad caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz (*regn.* 99–101/717–19), in accordance with his pious and saintly nature, initiated and partly carried out the task which his great predecessor—whom he tried to emulate in so many other respects—had conceived.⁴⁶ The teaching and collection of *ḥadīth* formed a major part of his plan for the moral regeneration of the Muslim community. He appointed paid teachers to teach the Qur'ān to the ignorant Bedouins, supported teachers and students of *fiqh*, sent instructions to the governor of the Hijāz that weekly lectures in *ḥadīth* should be arranged, and sent out men well-versed in the subject to Egypt and North Africa in order to teach the Muslims resident in those parts.⁴⁷

Fearing that the *ḥadīths* would be lost, he took steps also to bring about their collection. He wrote to a great Traditionist of Medina, Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥazm (d.120/737), requesting him to write down all the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet and of 'Umar, particularly those he could learn from 'Amra bint 'Abd al-Raḥmān, who was at that time the most respected custodian of the *ḥadīths* narrated by 'Ā'isha.⁴⁸ 'Umar II is also reported to have asked Sa'd ibn Ibrāhīm⁴⁹ and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī⁵⁰ to collect *ḥadīths* in the form of books in order to have these circulated throughout his dominions. According to Abū Nu'aym's *History of Isfahān*,⁵¹ 'Umar even wrote a circular letter asking the *ḥadīth* scholars living in the various parts of his country to collect in the form of books as many *ḥadīths* as were available.

The great work initiated by 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz was reinforced by the

general spirit of the age, and the process of creating written compilations accelerated. Abū Qilāba (d.104 or 107AH [722 or 725CE]) is said to have 'bequeathed his books'.⁵² Makhūl (d.116/734), who had travelled through Egypt and Syria, and had lived for a while at Medina in order to acquire knowledge in all these places,⁵³ wrote a book on the *Sunna* which was known to the Baghdad bookdealer Ibn al-Nadīm, author of the famous *Catalogue (Fihrist)*.⁵⁴ The traditionist al-Zuhri (d.124/742) is stated by Ibn Saʿd to have collected so many *ḥadīth*s that after his death his manuscripts needed several riding-beasts to transport them.⁵⁵

The early students and workers on the *ḥadīth* were followed by many *ḥadīth* specialists (now known as *muḥaddithūn*) who carried on the work begun by their predecessors in various provinces of the Muslim world. Of these major collectors of *ḥadīth*, ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Jurayj (d.150/760) worked at Mecca, Saʿd ibn ʿArūba (d.157/774) in Mesopotamia, al-Awzāʿī (d.159/775) in Syria, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (d.159/775) at Medina, Zāʿida ibn Qudāma (d.160/776) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d.161/777) at Kūfa, and Ḥammād ibn Salama (d.165/781) at Baṣra.⁵⁶

As almost all these works are lost, no opinion can be expressed on their plan, method or spirit. But Ibn al-Nadīm, who includes them in his catalogue, gives us a short comment on each. He calls the works of Ibn Jurayj, Ibn ʿArūba, al-Awzāʿī, Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and Zāʿida ibn Qudāma 'works on the *Sunna*', and says that they are arranged like the books of *fiqh*—into chapters devoted to the conventional *fiqh* problems. They were probably works of the same type as the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, the early law manual of Imām Mālik,⁵⁷ who might have followed in its general plan the system adopted by some of these earlier writers. Two of the books of Sufyān al-Thawrī, however, which were related by various scholars, were works of a different type. About one of them Ibn al-Nadīm tells us that it resembled the *ḥadīth* works⁵⁸—but this too has been lost.

1.5 THE MUWAṬṬAʾ

The earliest substantial work connected with our subject which is still extant is the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Imām Mālik (d.179/795), which has been described and analysed by the Hungarian scholar Ignaz Goldziher.⁵⁹ Goldziher correctly notes that the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* is not a work on *ḥadīth* in the same sense in which the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī and other later works are. 'It is', he says, 'a *corpus juris*, not a *corpus traditionum*. . . . Its intention is not to sift and collect the "healthy" elements of traditions circulating in the Islamic world but to

illustrate the law, ritual and religious practice, by the *ijmāʿ* recognised in Medinian Islam, by the *sunna* current in Medina, and to create a theoretical corrective, from the point of view of *ijmāʿ* and *sunna*, for things still in a state of flux.⁶⁰

To prove this theory, Goldziher cites the fact that Imām Mālik includes in his work a large number of *fatwās* and customs current in Medina,⁶¹ without trying to demonstrate them by means of *ḥadīth*; that even in quoting the *ḥadīths* he has not given the *isnād* in all cases, and that he has not made any mention of such *ḥadīths* as are of a purely historical character.

These facts serve to demonstrate that the *Muwattaʿa* was not intended to serve as a collection of *ḥadīths*. But it may be said with equal justice that it is not a book of *fiqh* in the same sense in which later books on *fiqh* are said to be works on the subject. It contains a very large number of *aḥādīth al-aḥkām* (legal traditions). According to Zurqānī, as Goldziher has pointed out, it contains 1,720 *ḥadīths*, of which 600 have *isnāds*, 222 are *mursal*, 613 are *mawqūf*, while 285 stop either at a Companion or a Successor (i.e. are either *mawqūf* of *maqṭūʿ*).⁶² According to al-Ghāfiqī, the total number of *ḥadīths* in the twelve versions of the *Muwattaʿa* is 666, out of which 97 differ in the different versions of the book, while the rest are common to all the various recensions.⁶³ The great difference between Zurqānī's and Ghāfiqī's estimates seems to be attributable to the latter's failure to take into account the versions of the *Muwattaʿa* compiled by Shaybānī and others.⁶⁴ Originally, however, the number of *ḥadīths* in the *Muwattaʿa* is reported to have been between 4,000 and 10,000, which was reduced by the author himself to about a thousand.⁶⁵

The *Muwattaʿa* may be treated as a brief but authoritative collection of legally-oriented *ḥadīths*. Some Muslim authorities, such as Ibn al-Athīr, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr and ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq Dihlawī include it in the six canonical collections in place of the *Sunan* of Ibn Māja. The majority, however, do not include it among the six, because almost all the important traditions it contains are included in the *Ṣaḥīḥs* of Bukhārī and Muslim.

On the analogy of the *Muwattaʿa*, however, we may reasonably assume that the other 'Sunan works' compiled before or simultaneously with it also contained a fair proportion of the legal *ḥadīth* material, and might therefore be treated like the *Muwattaʿa* as *ḥadīth* works.

1.6 THE LEGAL AND HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

Since the earliest times the Muslims have made a distinction between the legal traditions (*aḥādīth al-aḥkām*) and the purely historical material

(*maghāzī*). In the *Ṭabaqāt* of the third century scholar Ibn Sa'd some Companions are described as well-versed in the *fiqh*, while others are noted for their knowledge of the *maghāzī*. It appears that their treatment of the legal material was a good deal more critical and rigorous than their approach to the historical traditions, where they were at times relatively freer. Ṣuhayb, the well-known Companion, stated: 'Come, I will tell you the tale of our battles [*maghāzī*], but I will not relate to you that the Prophet said such-and-such a thing.'⁶⁶ Al-Sā'ib ibn Yazīd heard Ṭalḥa relate tales of the battle of Uḥud, whereas he did not hear other Companions relate any *ḥadīth* of the Prophet.⁶⁷ From these, and similar reports, it appears that the *maghāzī* served the early Muslims as topics for their general conversations. But with the legal traditions they were altogether more careful and scrupulous, as will be seen in the chapter which follows.

The word *fiqh* itself was sometimes used in the sense of *ḥadīth*. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, after relating a *ḥadīth*, points out that here the word *fiqh* is used in the sense of *ḥadīth*.⁶⁸ As a matter of fact, Islamic law in its earliest period consisted of little else than these legal traditions (*aḥādīth al-aḥkām*), which either upheld or transformed the current legal practice. It is for this reason that those Companions who are said to have related the largest number of *ḥadīths*, such as 'Ā'isha, Ibn Mas'ūd, and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, are described as *faqīhs* (scholars of the revealed Law).

None the less, the actual number of legal traditions appears to be quite small. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ṭabarī mentions only 1,029 of them in his work *al-Aḥkām al-Ṣughrā*, which is devoted to the legal traditions alone.⁶⁹ Al-Ḥāfiẓ 'Abd al-Ghanī, in his *Umdat al-Aḥkām*, mentions only 500 of them,⁷⁰ while Ibn Ḥajar in his *Bulūgh al-Marām* cites about 1,338 of them.⁷¹ It is true that Majd al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya, in his *Muntaqā*, cites a far larger number; but this is due in part to his habit of treating the sayings and acts of the Companions as *ḥadīths*, and sometimes treating various versions of a single *ḥadīth* as independent narrations.⁷²

1.7 CLASSIFICATION OF ḤADĪTH TEXTS

The following are the usual categories of *ḥadīth* collections:

- (a) *Ṣaḥīfa*. This is a collection of the sayings of the Prophet which were written down by one of his Companions during his lifetime or by their successors of the next generation.⁷³ Several of these *Ṣaḥīfas* are mentioned by Goldziher, according to whom some are also described as *Rasā'il* and *Kutub*.⁷⁴ One such collection, which was assembled by Abū Hurayra and

taught and handed down by him to his student Hammām ibn Munabbih, has been edited by Dr Hamidullah of Paris.⁷⁵ The most important of them, however, is the *Ṣaḥīfa* which was collected by ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (d.65/684), who gave it the title of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Ṣādiqa*.⁷⁶

Ibn al-Āṣ's *ṣaḥīfa* is said to have contained around a thousand traditions.⁷⁷ Other *ṣaḥīfas*, too, were often large documents:

For instance, Ḥumaid al-Ṭawīl, who borrowed and copied the books of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, gives a very graphic description of a sizeable *ṣaḥīfa* that contained the latter's *‘ilm*, by which is meant his collection of *ḥadīth*. He indicates that it was a roll as thick as a circle made by the joining of a man's thumbs and forefinger, that is, about six inches thick. This was also the size of some of Zuhri's *ḥadīth* collections.⁷⁸

(b) *Juz’*. This is a collection of *ḥadīths* handed down on the authority of one single individual, be he or she a Companion, or a member of any succeeding generation. The term *juz’* is also applied to collections of *ḥadīths* that were compiled on a specific subject, such as Intention, the Vision of God, and so forth.⁷⁹

(c) *Risāla*. This is a collection of *ḥadīths* which deals with one particular topic selected from the eight topics into which the contents of the *Jāmi’* books of *ḥadīth* may generally be classified:

- i Belief.
- ii Laws and rulings (*aḥkām*), also known as *sunan*, which include all the subjects of *fiqh*, from ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) to legacies (*waṣāyā*).
- iii *Riqāq*, that is, piety and asceticism.
- iv Manners (*ādāb*) of eating, drinking, travelling, etc.
- v Qur’ānic commentary (*tafsīr*).
- vi *Tārīkh* and *Sīyar*; i.e. historical and biographical matters, which include (a) cosmology, ancient history etc., and (b) the life of the Prophet, and of his Companions and Successors.
- vii Seditions and crises (*fitan*) anticipated towards the end of the world.
- viii The virtues (*manāqib*) and defects (*mathālib*) of various people, places etc.

A *Risāla* may also be known simply as a *kitāb* (book). To this class belong many of the works of late authors such as Ibn Ḥajar, al-Suyūṭī, etc.⁸⁰

(d) *Muṣannaf*. This is a more comprehensive collection of *ḥadīths* in which the traditions relating to most or all of the above eight topics are assembled and arranged in various 'books' or 'chapters', each dealing with a particular topic. To this class belong the *Muwattaʿa* of Imām Mālik, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, and similar works.⁸¹

(e) *Musnad*. This term, which literally means 'supported', was originally used for such traditions as were supported by a complete uninterrupted chain of authorities going back to the Prophet via a Companion.⁸² Later, however, the term came to be used in the more general sense of a reliable and authoritative tradition, being used in this sense as a title for all reliable works of the *ḥadīth* literature, so that works like the *Sunan* of Dārimī and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī are regularly called *Musnads*. More technically, however, it is reserved for those collections of *ḥadīths* whose material is arranged according to the names of their original narrating authorities, irrespective of subject-matter. Such are the *Musnads* of Abū Daūd al-Ṭayālīsī (d.204/819), Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d.233/847), 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Shayba (d.235/849), Abū Khaythama (d.234/844), and a number of others.⁸³ The collector of a *Musnad* is known as a *Musnid* or *Musnadi*.⁸⁴ The *Musnad* works themselves, however, differ in the detailed arrangement of the authorities who originally related them. In some of them, their names are arranged in alphabetical order. In others, they are arranged according to their respective merit in the acceptance of Islam and in taking part in the early important events of the Prophet's mission. In still others, they are arranged according to the affinity of their tribe to the Prophet.⁸⁵

There are, however, some *Musnad* works which are divided into chapters dedicated to particular subjects; in each such chapter the Traditions being arranged according to the original Companions by whom they were narrated. This plan is followed by the *Musnad* authors Abū Yaʿlā⁸⁶ (d.276/889) and Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān.⁸⁷ These works thus combined the characteristics of the *Musnad* and *Muṣannaf* genres.

It was the intention of some of the *Musnad* compilers to collect all the available traditions reported by the various Companions.⁸⁸ The *Musnad* of Ibn al-Najjār is said to have contained the traditions related by all the Companions, but this is no longer extant. The *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal contains more than 30,000 *ḥadīths* narrated by about 700 Companions.⁸⁹ According to Ḥājī Khalīfa, writing on the authority of Ibn Ḥazm, the *Musnad* of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān contained traditions related by 1,300 Companions.⁹⁰ There are, however, many *Musnad* works which are devoted to traditions related either by a special group of Companions or by one Companion only.

(f) *Mu'jam*. This is generally applied to works on various subjects arranged in alphabetical order. The geographical and biographical dictionaries of Yāqūt are known as *Mu'jam al-Buldān* and *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, because they are arranged alphabetically. Such *Musnad* collections of traditions as are arranged alphabetically under the names of the Companions are also known as *Mu'jam al-Ṣaḥāba*. But according to the *ḥadīth* specialists, the term is used technically for collections of *ḥadīth* which are arranged not according to the Companions who reported them, but according to the Traditionists from whom the compiler himself received them. The names of such Traditionists (*shuyūkh*) are arranged alphabetically,⁹¹ and all the traditions received from each *shaykh* are then collected together irrespective of their contents and subject-matter. To this class belong two of the collections of al-Ṭabarānī (d.360/970) and the collections of Ibrāhīm ibn Ismā'il (d.371/981) and Ibn Qānī' (d.350/960).⁹² The largest collection by Ṭabarānī is in reality a *Musnad* work, not a *Mu'jam*, being a *Mu'jam al-Ṣaḥāba*, not a *Mu'jam al-Shuyūkh*.⁹³

(g) *Jāmi'*. This is a *ḥadīth* collection which contains traditions relating to all the eight topics listed above under the rubric of *Risāla*. Thus, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī, as well as the principal book of al-Tirmidhī, is known as a *Jāmi'*. The *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, by contrast, is not so styled, because although it is comprehensive in most areas, it does not contain traditions relating to all the chapters of the Qur'ān.

(h) *Sunan*. These are collections which only contain *aḥādīth al-aḥkām* (legal-liturgical traditions), and omit material relating to historical, spiritual and other matters. Thus the *ḥadīth* collections made by Abū Daūd, al-Nasā'ī and many other traditionists fall into this class.

(i) *Mustadrak*. This is a collection in which the compiler, having accepted the conditions laid down by a previous compiler, collects together such other traditions as fulfil those conditions and were missed by his predecessor. To this class belongs the *Mustadrak* of al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, who assembled a large number of *ḥadīths* which fulfilled the stringent conditions laid down by Bukhārī and Muslim, but were not included by them in their *Ṣaḥīḥs*.⁹⁴

(j) *Mustakhraj*. This is a collection of *ḥadīths* in which a later compiler collects fresh and additional *isnāds* to add to those cited by an original compiler. To this class belongs the *mustakhraj* of Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī on the *Ṣaḥīḥs* of Bukhārī and Muslim. In this book, Abū Nu'aym gives new *isnāds* for some of the traditions included by Bukhārī and Muslim, thereby reinforcing their authority still further.

(k) *Arbā'īyyāt*. As the name indicates, these are collections contain-

ing forty *ḥadīth* related to one or more subjects which may have appeared to be of special interest to the compiler. The best-known example is the *Forty Ḥadīth* of al-Nawawī.⁹⁵

Of all these eleven classes, the *Ṣaḥīfas* were the earliest in origin, while the *Muʿjams*, the *Mustadraks*, the *Mustakhrajs* and the *Arbaʿīniyyāt* must have been the latest to appear. The *Juzʿ* and *Risāla* literature, in the technical sense outlined above, must also have evolved slightly later than the *Muṣannaf* and *Musnad* works. Since the *Sunan* and *Jāmiʿ* types are in reality no more than subdivisions of the *Muṣannaf* works, the only chronological problem is that of the priority of the *Musnad* and *Muṣannaf* works. Addressing this difficulty, Goldziher is of the opinion that the *Musnads* are of earlier origin than the *Muṣannafs*, which originated under the influence of the legal system of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*.⁹⁶ Yet since the collection of traditions was substantially motivated by their legal importance, it seems not unlikely that some of the very earliest collections were arranged according to subject matter, as this related to the Islamic legal, ritual or religious problems—as is also suggested by the title *Sunan* conventionally given to them.

THE COMPANIONS

2.1 'COMPANION' DEFINED

THE term *al-ṣahāba* or *al-aṣḥāb* (singular, *al-ṣaḥābī* and *al-Ṣāḥib*, a Companion) is used by the Muslims as a title of honour for those believers who had enjoyed the privilege of having lived in the Prophet's company. The Islamic scholars are not in agreement, however, on the exact qualifications necessary for being a *ṣaḥābī*. Some have held that every Muslim who saw the Prophet was a Companion. Others have thought that only through long association with him could one join this category. The majority of writers, however, have held that the term may be applied to every adult Muslim who associated with the Prophet for any length of time. His near relations, his close friends, his attendants, as well as ordinary Muslims who saw him even once, are generally included within the definition.¹

It was the Companions who reported the *ḥadīth* corpus from the Prophet. They represent the primal authorities from whom, via the Successors (*tābiʿūn*—their students and associates), are handed down the Traditions of Islam. Upon their reliability and honesty rests to a large degree the trustworthiness of the great mass of *ḥadīths* collected by the Muslim scholars of the subsequent generations.²

2.2 THE NUMBER OF THE COMPANIONS

The exact number of the Companions cannot, of course, be determined. Only once during the early years of Islam was a 'census' taken, when they were found to be 1,525.³ This census must have been done at about the time of the Treaty of Hudaibiya, when the danger to the Muslims was great, and an estimate of their actual strength seemed called for. After that time the number of Muslims grew dramatically, and before the death of the Prophet almost the whole of the Arabian peninsula had accepted Islam.

A large number of these Muslims had seen the Prophet and listened to his orations and sayings. Forty thousand of them were present when he performed the Farewell Pilgrimage at Mecca.⁴ The number of all those who ever saw or heard him has been estimated by Abū Zar'a al-Rāzī at above 100,000.⁵

2.3 THE COMPANION-NARRATORS

Not all these Companions related the *ḥadīths* of their teacher. The *Musnad* of Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān referred to previously, which is said to have been the largest collection of *ḥadīths*, was said to contain traditions related by only 1,300 Companions.⁶ Ibn al-Jawzī, who provides a list of all the Companions who related traditions, gives the names of about 1,060 together with the number of *ḥadīths* related by each.⁷ Five hundred of them are said to have related one *ḥadīth* apiece; a hundred and thirty-two are stated to have handed down two traditions each, eighty have related three each, fifty-two have related four traditions each, thirty-two, five each, twenty-six, six each, twenty-seven, seven each, eighteen, eight each, and eleven, nine traditions each. Sixty Companions are credited with having related 10–20 *ḥadīths* apiece; the remainder, listed in the table below, have all related twenty or more each.

	NAME OF COMPANION	NUMBER OF ḤADĪTHS
1	Abū Shurayḥ al-Kābī	20
2	'Abd Allāh ibn Jarrād	20
3	Muṣawwir ibn Makhrama ⁸	20
4	'Amr ibn Umayya al-Ḍamrī	20
5	'Amr ibn Umayya (another)	20
6	Ṣafwān ibn 'Assāl	20
7	Sa'd ibn 'Ubāda	21
8	al-Rabī'	21
9	al-Sā'ib	22
10	Qurra	22
11	'Umayr ibn Rabī'a	22
12	Umm Qays	24
13	Laqīṭ ibn 'Āmir	24
14	al-Sharīd ⁹	24
15	Rifā'a ibn Rāfi'	24

16	‘Abd Allāh ibn Unays	24
17	Aws ibn Aws	24
18	al-Faḍl ibn ‘Abbās	24
19	Abū Wāqid al-Laythī	24
20	Abū Talḥa al-Anṣārī	25
21	‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām	25
22	Sahl ibn Abī Hathma ¹⁰ (Haythama?)	25
23	Abū al-Mulayḥ al-Hudhalī ¹¹	25
24	‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far	25
25	Ya‘lā ibn Murra	26
26	Abū Humayd al-Sā‘idī	26
27	Abū Malik al-Ash‘arī ¹²	27
28	‘Abd Allāh ibn Buhayna ¹³	27
29	Abū Usayd al-Ṣā‘idī ¹⁴	28
30	‘Utba ibn ‘Abd	28
31	Ya‘lā ibn Umayya	28
32	‘Uthmān ibn Abī l-‘Āṣ	29
33	Umm al-Faḍl bint al-Ḥārith	30
34	Ṣuhayb	30
35	‘Iyāḍ ibn Ḥimār (Ḥammād?)	30
36	Mu‘adh ibn Anas	30
37	‘Irbāḍ ibn Sāriya ¹⁵	31
38	Khubāb ibn al-Araq ¹⁶	32
39	‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr	33
40	Fāṭima bint Qays	34
41	Ma‘qil ibn Yasār ¹⁷	34
42	al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib	35
43	‘Amr ibn ‘Abasa ¹⁸	38
44	Khuzayma ibn Thābit ¹⁹	38
45	Talḥa ibn ‘Abd Allāh	38
46	al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām ²⁰	38
47	‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ	39
48	Umm ‘Aṭiyya	40
49	Abū Tha‘laba al-Khushanī ²¹	40
50	Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām ²²	40
51	Sahl ibn Hunayf ²³	40
52	Mu‘āwiya ibn Hayda ²⁴	42
53	al-Miqdād	42
54	‘Abd Allāh ibn Mughfil ²⁵	43
55	Jundab ibn ‘Abd Allāh	43

56	Bilāl al-Ḥabashī	44
57	Abū Juḥayfa	45
58	Umm Hānī	46
59	Abū Barza ²⁶	46
60	Ka'b ibn Ujra ²⁷	47
61	al-Miqdām	47
62	‘Abd Allāh ibn Zayd	48
63	Sa‘īd ibn Zayd ibn ‘Amr	48
64	‘Abd Allāh ibn Bishr	50
65	Shaddād ibn Aws	50
66	Asmā’ bint Abī Bakr	58
67	Asmā’ bint ‘Umays	60
68	Ḥafṣa Umm al-Mu’minīn	60
69	Jubayr ibn Muṭ‘im	60
70	Salmān al-Fārisī	60
71	‘Amr ibn ‘Awf	62
72	‘Ammār ibn Yāsir	62
73	‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf	65
74	Umm Ḥabība Umm al-Mu’minīn	65
75	‘Adī ibn Ḥātim	66
76	Abū Rāfi‘	68
77	Zayd ibn Arqam	70
78	Wā’il ibn Ḥujr ²⁸	71
79	Maymūna Umm al-Mu’minīn	76
80	Salama ibn al-Akwa‘	77
81	Rāfi‘ ibn Khudayj ²⁹	78
82	Zayd ibn Khālīd	81
83	Zayd ibn Thābit	92
84	‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Awfā	95
85	Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh ³⁰	100
86	Abū Mas‘ūd al-Anṣārī	102
87	al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr	144
88	Samura ibn Jundab ³¹	123
89	Thawbān	128
90	Usāma ibn Zayd	128
91	Abū Bakra Nufay‘	132
92	al-Mughīra ibn Shu‘ba	136
93	Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq	142
94	Jābir ibn Samura	146
95	‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān	146

96	Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī	155
97	Muʿadh ibn Jabal	157
98	Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān	163
99	Ubayy ibn Kaʿb	164
100	Burayda ibn al-Ḥasīb ³²	167
101	Abū Qatāda	170
102	Abū al-Dardāʾ	179
103	ʿImrān ibn al-Ḥuṣayn ³³	180
104	ʿUbāda ibn al-Ṣāmit	181
105	Sahl ibn Saʿd	188
106	Maʿd ibn Yamān	225
107	Abū Umāma al-Bāhilī ³⁴	250
108	Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ	271
109	Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī	281
110	al-Barāʾ ibn ʿAzib	305
111	Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī	360
112	Umm Salama, Umm al-Muʾminīn	378
113	ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib	536
114	ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb	537
115	ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ	700
116	ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd	848
117	Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī	1170
118	Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh	1540
119	ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās	1660
120	ʿĀʾisha Umm al-Muʾminīn	2210
121	Anas ibn Malik	2286
122	ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar	2630
123	Abū Hurayra ³⁵	5374

From the above it becomes clear that the great mass of the traditions which have come down to us are related by fewer than three hundred Companions. The *Muwattaʿa*ʾ of Imām Mālik contains the traditions of only 98 Companions.³⁶ The *Musnad* of al-Ṭayālīsī contains the *ḥadīths* of some 281 Companions, while the *Musnad* of Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal includes the *ḥadīths* narrated by about 700 Companions.³⁷ The two *Ṣaḥīḥs* of Bukhārī and Muslim contain the material of 208 and 213 Companions respectively, of whom 149 are common between the two great works.³⁸

Only 55 have related a hundred or more traditions, and of these, only eleven are responsible for passing down more than five hundred each. Six or

seven of the latter, each of whom has reported more than a thousand *ḥadīths*, are known as the *Mukaththirūn*: the reporters of many traditions.³⁹

All these seven Companions enjoyed the privilege of long association with the Prophet, had a tremendous thirst for his *ḥadīth*, and could speak with authority about what he had said and done. They lived for a considerable time after his demise, when the mass of the traditions which they had learnt was handed down to the succeeding generations; whereas the knowledge gathered by the Companions who were either killed in the early battles or died shortly after the death of the Prophet could not spread among the Muslims, and was lost for ever.

The following is a brief guide to some of the most prolific *ḥadīth* narrators.

(a) ‘ABD ALLĀH (or ‘Abd al-Raḥmān) ABŪ HURAYRA.⁴⁰ Abū Hurayra stands at the head of the list of *ḥadīth* transmitters, due to the sheer bulk of his narrations. He had been regarded by the Prophet himself as the most anxious of all Muslims to acquire knowledge of *ḥadīth*. Belonging to the tribe of Daws, an offshoot of the great clan of Azd,⁴¹ he came to Medina in the seventh year of the Hijra, and on being told that the Prophet was at Khaybar, went there and accepted Islam. Since that time, and until the death of the Prophet, he kept his company constantly, attending him and memorising his words during the day, thereby sacrificing all worldly pursuits and pleasures.⁴² We are told that he divided his nights into three parts: one for sleeping, one for prayer, and one for study.⁴³ After the death of the Prophet, he was appointed governor of Baḥrayn for a while during the caliphate of ‘Umar, and acted as governor of Medina under the early Umayyad caliphs.⁴⁴ He died in 59/678.

When the Prophet had died, and information about religion and legal judgements had to be sought indirectly, Abū Hurayra (who instructed more than 800 students in *ḥadīth*) poured out the store of knowledge he had so meticulously accumulated. At times he was taken to task for reporting certain traditions which were unknown to other Companions. But he would reply that he had simply learnt what the Anṣār had missed because of attending to their lands and properties, and what the Emigrants had failed to learn because of their commercial activities.⁴⁵ Once, when he was taken to task by ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar for relating a particular *ḥadīth*, he took him to ‘Ā’isha, who bore witness to the truth of what he had related.⁴⁶ His knowledge and memory were also tested by Marwān, who, having written down some traditions related by him, wanted him to relate the same after a year. He found them to be exactly identical to his earlier narration.⁴⁷

Bearing in mind Abū Hurayra’s intense dedication to learning *ḥadīth*, his

devotion to the Prophet, and the various tests which were applied to his memory and scholarship by his contemporaries during his life, it appears very unlikely that he himself fabricated any *ḥadīth*.⁴⁸ This does not mean, however, that material was not falsely imputed to him at a later date. The fact that he narrated a uniquely large number of traditions itself did make inventing *ḥadīths* in his name an attractive proposition.⁴⁹

(b) 'ABD ALLĀH IBN 'UMAR.⁵⁰ The second most prolific narrator of *ḥadīth*, he was the son of the second Caliph. He had accepted Islam simultaneously with his father, and emigrated to Medina with him. He took part in many battles during the Prophet's lifetime, and in the wars in Mesopotamia, Persia and Egypt, but maintained a strict neutrality in the conflicts which erupted among the Muslims following the assassination of 'Uthmān. Despite the immense esteem and honour in which he was held by all Muslims, who repeatedly asked him to become caliph (an offer which he refused), he kept himself aloof from factional strife, and throughout those years led an unselfish, pious life, setting an example of an ideal citizen just as his father had set an example of an ideal ruler. He died in Mecca in the year 74/692 at the age of 87.

'Abd Allāh's long association with the Prophet, his kinship with Ḥafṣa Umm al-Mu'minin, and with certain other Companions, offered him a superb opportunity to learn *ḥadīths*; and his long peaceful life gave him time and leisure enough to teach and spread *ḥadīths* among the Muslims who assiduously sought them.

He was renowned for the extreme scrupulousness with which he related *ḥadīths*. Al-Sha'bī remarks that he did not hear a single *ḥadīth* from him for a whole year.⁵¹ When he related *ḥadīths*, his eyes filled with tears.⁵² His activities in the service of Islam, his austere life, his straightforward and honest character, and his careful treatment of the *ḥadīths*, render the material we have from him of the highest value.

(c) Abū Ḥamza ANAS IBN MALIK.⁵³ At the age of ten, Anas was presented by his mother, Umm Sulaym, to the Prophet, following his migration to Medina. From that time until the Prophet's death, he was his favourite attendant,⁵⁴ and afterwards he was appointed by Abū Bakr as a tax-collector at Baḥrayn. Towards the end of his life he settled at Basra, where he died in the year 93/711, at the age of over a hundred.

During the ten years he spent in the Prophet's service, he was able to memorise a large number of his words, of which he later also learnt a good deal from Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and many other Companions.⁵⁵ His knowledge of *ḥadīth* was so copious that his death was regarded as a death-blow to half of the entire mass of traditions.⁵⁶

The traditionists accept him as one of the most reliable narrators of *ḥadīth*.

(d) 'Ā'ISHA UMM AL-MU'MINĪN. 'Ā'isha occupies the fourth place among the *mukaththirūn*. She enjoyed the constant company of the Prophet for about eight and a half years.⁵⁷ She died in 57/676 at the age of 65.⁵⁸

'Ā'isha was naturally endowed with a retentive memory and a developed critical faculty, having memorised a large number of the ancient Arab poems, on which she was a recognised authority. During her lifetime she was also honoured for her expertise in medicine and in Islamic law.⁵⁹ Regarding the *ḥadīth*, she had not only learnt a large volume of these from her husband, she also showed a critical appreciation of them, and corrected the mistakes in understanding of many Companions.⁶⁰ When, for instance, Ibn 'Umar related that the Prophet had said that the dead are punished in their graves on account of the wailing of their relatives, she pointed out that the Prophet had said that while the dead are punished in their graves for their sins, their relatives wept for them.⁶¹

It was on account of her extensive knowledge of *ḥadīth* and Islamic law that even the most important Companions sought her advice on legal problems. A long list of those who related *ḥadīth* on her authority may be found in Ibn Hajar's book *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*.⁶²

(e) Abu'l-'Abbās 'ABD ALLĀH IBN AL-'ABBĀS. He was born three years before the Prophet's migration to Medina,⁶³ and was thirteen years old at the time of his death. He was greatly loved by the Prophet, as is apparent from the *ḥadīths* which concern him. He died in 68/687 at the age of 71.⁶⁴

It appears that despite his youth he learnt a few *ḥadīths* from the Prophet himself. Ibn Hajar (quoting Yahyā ibn al-Qaṭṭān) refers to the assertion that Ibn 'Abbās related only four or ten traditions from the Prophet, and adds that this estimate is incorrect, because the *Ṣaḥīḥs* of Bukhārī and Muslim alone contain more than ten traditions related by him directly from the Prophet.⁶⁵ There is, however, no doubt that the number of *ḥadīths* related by him directly from the Prophet is very small in comparison to what he related via other Companions. These *ḥadīths* he learnt through years of hard labour: 'If I expected to learn any *ḥadīth* from a Companion,' he remarked, 'I went to his door and waited there, until he came out and said: "Cousin of the Prophet, what brings you here? Why did you not send for me?" And I would reply that it was only proper that I should go to him. Then I learnt the *ḥadīth* from him.'⁶⁶

Ibn 'Abbās was held in universal awe for his intellectual powers and capacity for memorisation. He was entirely devoted to the study of the Qur'an and the *Sunna*, and was loved and respected for his scholarship by all

the first four Caliphs and his contemporaries. He collected a large body of traditions, which he wrote down in books, and delivered lectures on them to his disciples.⁶⁷ His *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān which was handed down by his student Mujāhid is well-known, and has been referred to by numerous later commentators.⁶⁸

Some aspects of his political activity have been criticised severely. But his fame rests on his intellectual attainments, not his politics. The reliability of the *ḥadīths* which may be proved to extend back in time to him, is unquestionable. Much, however, of what has been attributed to him must have been forged by later narrators.

(f) JĀBIR IBN 'ABD ALLĀH. One of the early Medinan converts to Islam, he was present at the second meeting with the Prophet at Mecca.⁶⁹ He took part in nineteen expeditions in the Prophet's company,⁷⁰ and died in Medina in about the year 74/693 at the age of 94.⁷¹

He learnt the Prophet's *ḥadīth* not only from him, but also from many of his important Companions, including Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and others. He also studied under some of the Successors, including the famous Umm Kulthūm, the daughter of Abū Bakr. He used to teach *ḥadīth* regularly in the mosque at Medina.⁷²

(g) ABŪ SA'ĪD AL-KHUDRĪ, Sa'd ibn Mālik. Another early Medinan convert, his father was killed at Uhud. He himself took part in twelve of the battles fought during the Prophet's lifetime. He died in Medina in 64/683.⁷³

Like Abū Hurayra, he had been one of the 'People of the Veranda', those who lived on the porch of the Prophet's dwelling by the mosque in order to dedicate themselves to an austere life of prayer and learning. He learnt the *Sunna* from the Prophet, as well as from his important Companions such as Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and Zayd ibn Thābit. He was considered the best jurist among the younger Companions.

(h) 'ABD ALLĀH IBN MAS'ŪD. He is said to have been one of the first six converts to Islam. He specialised in the interpretation of the Qur'ān, for which he is one of the major early authorities.⁷⁴

(i) 'ABD ALLĀH IBN 'AMR IBN AL-'ĀṢ. An early convert to Islam, who had suffered for its cause, had enjoyed the company of the Prophet for many years, and lived long enough after he was gone to transmit the *ḥadīths* which he had learnt from him. Ibn 'Amr, although he lived during the period of the civil war, resembled Ibn 'Umar in keeping himself aloft from factional strife. He was, however, present at the Battle of Šiffin, at the insistence of his father; however he took no active part in it, deeply regretting in later life that he had been present at all.⁷⁵

His interest in perpetuating the way of the Prophet was intense. He wrote

down all the Traditions which he had learnt from him, collecting a thousand of them in a *ṣaḥīfa* which he called *al-Ṣādiqa*.⁷⁶ When he settled at Mecca, students of *ḥadīth* flocked to him in droves. But as he lived for the most part either in Egypt or at al-Ṭā'if, and since he occupied himself more with prayer than with the teaching of *ḥadīth*, the later generations of Muslims received fewer traditions from him than from Abū Hurayra, 'Ā'isha and others.⁷⁷

2.4 THE SCRUPULOUSNESS OF THE COMPANIONS

The transformative presence of the Prophet, whose emphasis on honesty and integrity was impressed on all who knew him, together with the Qur'ānic warnings against the practice of wilful scriptural distortion which had brought about the destruction of previous religious communities, created an atmosphere of anxious scrupulousness in the reporting of his words and conduct.⁷⁸ Abū Bakr, when Caliph, was concerned to learn *ḥadīths*, but was careful not to accept the words of those who reported them without an independent witness.⁷⁹ He also asked Muslims not to relate traditions which might cause discord among them.⁸⁰ 'Umar, the second Caliph, carefully followed the example set by his predecessor; for instance, he obliged al-Mughīra ibn Shu'ba,⁸¹ Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī,⁸² 'Amr ibn Umayya,⁸³ and Ubayy ibn Ka'b⁸⁴ to produce witnesses to corroborate the traditions they narrated, despite the great esteem in which they were held. He is even said to have briefly imprisoned Ibn Mas'ūd, Abu'l-Dardā' and Abū Mas'ūd al-Anṣārī because they related too many traditions.⁸⁵ His successor 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān was also careful to report the words of the Prophet with the utmost care,⁸⁶ while 'Alī would not accept any *ḥadīth* until its reporter attested to it on oath,⁸⁷ and used to remark that he would rather the sky fell on his head than be guilty of attributing a false *ḥadīth* to the Prophet.⁸⁸ Ibn Mas'ūd was so cautious in relating traditions that we are told that whenever he recited one he began to perspire nervously, adding immediately that God's Messenger had either said this, or something like it.⁸⁹ Al-Zubayr was reluctant to relate *ḥadīths*, because he had heard the Prophet say that whoever attributed anything to him falsely would be preparing his own seat in hell.⁹⁰ Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ feared that people might add to what he related.⁹¹

So great was the Companions' fear of committing mistakes when relating the words of the Prophet that many of them refused to relate any *ḥadīth* at all unless it was absolutely necessary. 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, for instance, only related two or three *ḥadīths* in a month.⁹² Sa'd ibn Yazīd once travelled with the erudite Sa'd ibn Mālik from Medina to Mecca, and did not hear him

relate a single *ḥadīth*.⁹³ Al-Sha'bī lived with 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar for a whole year, but never heard him relate a single *ḥadīth*.⁹⁴ Al-Sā'ib ibn Yazīd reports that he once was together with 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Awf and Ṭalḥa ibn 'Ubayd Allāh, and heard nothing in the way of *ḥadīths* except Ṭalḥa's account of the battle of Uḥud.⁹⁵ Ṣuhayb, too, was always ready to relate historical traditions (*maghāzī*), but otherwise rarely dared to report the words of the Prophet.⁹⁶

2.5 THE CONTROVERSY OVER KITĀBA: THE WRITTEN PERPETUATION OF ḤADĪTHS

Despite this reluctance on the part of some Companions to take part in the process of *ḥadīth* narration, and their extreme scrupulousness, there were some among them who, having learnt the art of writing, wrote down *ḥadīths*, in some instances during the lifetime of the Prophet himself.⁹⁷ 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr, for instance, requested his permission to do this, and thereafter wrote down whatever he heard from him.⁹⁸ His collection, *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Ṣādiqa*,⁹⁹ was seen by Mujāhid, and later came into the possession of 'Amr ibn Shu'ayb, a great-grandson of 'Abd Allāh.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, it is said that 'Alī, the son-in-law of the Prophet, had in his possession a *Ṣaḥīfa* which contained certain laws.¹⁰¹ Another *Ṣaḥīfa* is said to have been in the possession of Samura ibn Jundab, a document which, according to Goldziher, is identical to his *Risāla* addressed to his son, and which contained many *ḥadīths*.¹⁰² Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh likewise had a *Ṣaḥīfa*, the contents of which were later transmitted by Qatāda.¹⁰³ Sa'd is also reported to have had a book from which his son related certain usages of the Prophet.¹⁰⁴ Bukhārī mentions a *ḥadīth* related from the 'book' of 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Awfā,¹⁰⁵ while Abū Bakr, the first Caliph, is reported to have collected five hundred *ḥadīths*, which he later destroyed because he suspected that it contained some *ḥadīths* related by unreliable people.¹⁰⁶ Ibn 'Abbās wrote down the *ḥadīths* which he learnt from Abū Rāfi'.¹⁰⁷ He appears to have collected *ḥadīth* in more than one book. Tirmidhī reports in his *Kitāb al-'Ilal* that some people from al-Tā'if brought one of his books to Ibn 'Abbās, and read it to him;¹⁰⁸ he is also said by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr to have left at his death so many books that they might serve as a complete load for a camel; these books were later used by his son 'Alī.¹⁰⁹ It is from these books of Ibn 'Abbās that al-Wāqidī may have drawn some of his material, as is shown by a passage cited in the *Mawāhib*.¹¹⁰ Abū Hurayra, too, is said to have written down *ḥadīths*—probably towards the end of his life. These he showed to Ibn

Wahb¹¹¹ and to Umayya al-Damrī.¹¹² The *Ṣaḥīfa* of Hammām, based on the reports of Abū Hurayra, is of course well-known.¹¹³

In addition to this kind of report, which establishes that the Companions assembled actual written collections of *ḥadīth*, we also have numerous reports indicating that they regularly wrote down individual *ḥadīths* that they had learnt or encountered. A report in the *Sunan* of Tirmidhī tells us that one of the Anṣār complained to the Prophet about his weak memory, and was advised by him to take assistance from his right hand—i.e., to write material down.¹¹⁴ Another Companion, al-Rāfi' (also known as Abū Rāfi'), secured the Prophet's permission to write down *ḥadīths*.¹¹⁵ A certain Abū Shāh, hearing the Prophet's oration in the year of the Conquest of Mecca, asked him to have it written down for him, and his request was granted.¹¹⁶ 'Itbān ibn Mālik al-Anṣārī liked a *ḥadīth* so much that he wrote it down, so as to possess a physical copy of it.¹¹⁷

The Prophet had himself dictated certain laws, with respect, for instance, to the poor-tax,¹¹⁸ the Prayer and the fast, charity, and blood-money.¹¹⁹ One such document, containing laws with regard to the revenues which had been sent to officials was found after his death attached to his sword, and in time came into the possession of his successors.¹²⁰

Despite this, however, there are many traditions which forbid the writing down of any scriptural material other than the Qur'ān.¹²¹ Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, Zayd ibn Thābit (the Prophet's own scribe), and Abū Hurayra, related traditions to this effect;¹²² and many other Companions and Successors are reported to have disliked and discouraged the writing of *ḥadīth*. In particular, there are the names of 'Alī, Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, Ibn Sīrīn, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, 'Ābida al-Madaniyya, Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, Ibn al-Mu'tamir, al-Awzā'ī, 'Alqama ibn Qays, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh, and others.¹²³ Some such authorities (like 'Alī and Ibn 'Abbās), are, as we have already seen, also reported to have written *ḥadīths* down, and possessed *ṣaḥīfas* and other books. Others (for instance al-Ḍaḥḥāk, Ibrāhīm, and 'Alqama) are said to have objected to the writing of *ḥadīths* in book form, but not to making such notes as might serve to help the memory. Others still (such as Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn Sīrīn) are said to have opposed the writing of *ḥadīth* in any form.¹²⁴

The *ḥadīth* analysts have attempted to explain this apparent contradiction in various ways. Ibn Qutayba, in his book *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* (*Interpretation of Divergent Hadīths*) says that either the prohibitive *ḥadīths* belong to an earlier period in the life of the Prophet, and are abrogated (*naskh*) by the later ones which carry a permission, or, alternatively, the prohibition was meant only for such Companions as were not well trained in

the art of writing, and did not include those who could write proficiently without fear of distortion.¹²⁵

We know, however, that although the art of writing was introduced into Arabia at some time before the birth of the Prophet, and Arabic prose works were not entirely unknown to the Arabs before his day, they were not particularly widespread in Arabia before the advent of Islam. It is said that in pre-Islamic Mecca (the most advanced Arab city), only seventeen people knew how to write.¹²⁶ In Medina, where the influence of the Jews (who are said to have been the teachers of the Arabs in this regard) had been considerable, the number of Arabs who could write was less than a dozen, only nine of these being mentioned by name by Ibn Sa'd,¹²⁷ who also remarks that writing was a rarity in Arabia before Islam, and that it was considered a great distinction to know it. Such people who combined the knowledge of the art of writing, swimming and archery were known as *al-kāmil*, the perfect.¹²⁸ But the contrary opinion was also in the air: we are told, for instance, that Dhu'l-Rumma, the last Mukhaḍram poet of Arabia, concealed his knowledge of this art on account of public opinion against it.¹²⁹

Despite this, new conditions meant that the Prophet encouraged the popularising of this art among the Arabs. Under his guidance, many Muslims who came under his influence at an early age (such as 'Alī, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr, and Ibn 'Abbās), learnt to read and write. He requested 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'īd ibn al-Āṣī of Mecca to teach the people of Medina to write.¹³⁰ He was also concerned with female literacy: he asked Shifā' bint 'Abd Allāh to teach reading and writing to his wife Ḥafṣa.¹³¹ After the Battle of Badr he declared that any prisoner of war who was too poor to pay the required ransom and who knew the art of writing could regain his liberty by teaching Muslim children to write;¹³² it was from one of these prisoners of war that Zayd ibn Thābit, the trusted scribe of the Qur'ān, himself learnt to read and write.¹³³ Neither could it have been without the suggestion of the Prophet that 'Ubbāda ibn al-Ṣāmit taught the Qur'ān and the art of writing to some of the People of the Veranda, one of whom presented him with a bow in exchange.¹³⁴

Indirectly, too, the Prophet played a key role in spreading written literacy among the Arabs, by means of establishing a state which wrote down its treaties with the various tribes, its constitution, letters to the various tribal chiefs, orders to officials, and laws for conducting the affairs of state. His immediate successors made reading and writing compulsory in the schools which they established. Thus did Islam inaugurate what can only be described as the most effective literacy programme known to history.

The conclusion is generally drawn that the sayings of the Prophet which discourage the writing of *ḥadīth*, being fewer and weaker than those which encourage it, must have been based either on the generally unfavourable public opinion prevailing in Arabia at the beginning of his career as prophet, or on fears that written *ḥadīth* might become confused with the text of the Qur'ān, about the purity of which he was so scrupulous. But as soon as he discerned that these hazards were at an end, he permitted the written recording of *ḥadīth*. The date of one *ḥadīth* in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, which gives to Abū Shāh permission to write down one of his discourses, is dated the year of the Conquest of Mecca, a fact which would favour the view that the *ḥadīths* which allow the writing of *ḥadīths* postdate those which indicate a prohibition. The fact of the dictation of certain laws in the later years of the Prophet's life also lends support to this theory. Similarly, the attitude of 'Umar I towards the collection of *ḥadīths* shows that the prohibition was not in force during that time. It is reported, too, that 'Umar intended to collect *ḥadīths*, and it is extremely unlikely that he would have considered the matter seriously for an entire month as he did, had he been aware of any Prophetic teaching to forbid the writing-down of *ḥadīth* material, particularly since all the Companions appear to have advised him in favour of such a collection; while he explained his final decision against doing so in terms of his fear of the neglect of the Qur'ān rather than any alleged Prophetic prohibition known to him.

Western scholars, too, have held that *ḥadīths* were written down during the Prophet's life. Goldziher, for instance, writes that:

It can be assumed that the writing down of the *ḥadīth* was a very ancient method of preserving it, and that reluctance to preserve it in written form was merely the result of later considerations . . . Many a Companion of the Prophet is likely to have carried his *Ṣaḥīfa* with him and used it to dispense instruction and edification to his circle. The contents of these *Ṣaḥīfas* were called *matn al-ḥadīth*; those who disseminated these texts named in succession their immediate authorities, and thus the *isnād* came into being.¹³⁵

AFTER THE COMPANIONS

May God bless him who heard from us a saying, and preserved it (in his memory) so that he might carry it forth to others; for verily, many a person carries knowledge to a man more learned than himself, and many of those who have carried knowledge have not assimilated it themselves.

Ḥadīth cited by Tirmidhī¹

3.1 THE SUCCESSORS (AL-TĀBĪ'ŪN)

AFTER the death of the Prophet and the inauguration of the vast Islamic polity, the Companions settled in different garrison-towns (*amṣār*) in the various provinces. In these towns they were surrounded by a large number of Muslims who had not known the Prophet, and who were eager to hear reports of his words and deeds from those who had associated with him and had heard his counsels. Abu'l-Dardā' at Damascus, Abū Idrīs at Emesa, Ḥudhayfa at Kūfa, Anas ibn Mālīk at Baṣra, Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, 'Ā'isha and others at Medina, and a galaxy of other Companions at other major towns, attracted to themselves large circles of disciples who not only learnt from them the *ḥadīths* of their master, but also acquired from them the ethos of questing for the Traditions, and their careful cultivation and preservation.

Abu'l-Dardā' had such a crowd of disciples that their multitude resembled the entourage of kings.² Mu'adh ibn Jabal, together with 32 other Companions, related *ḥadīths* to their disciples at Emesa.³ Ḥudhayfa delivered lectures on *ḥadīth* to a band of eager disciples in a mosque at Kūfa,⁴ while Ubayy ibn Ka'b was one of the many Companions who taught *ḥadīths* to students in the original mosque of Medina.⁵

The early Muslims appear to have been extremely eager to hear the reports

of the Prophet's *ḥadīths* from his Companions. It is related that such a large crowd of them collected round a Companion when he related *ḥadīths* that he was obliged to climb onto the roof of a nearby house so that he could be heard.⁶ Abū Ḥanīfa reports that when he once went to Mecca with his father for the pilgrimage he saw there a large crowd listening intently to a Companion who related to them the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet.⁷

These enthusiastic disciples of the Companions are known among the traditionists by the honorific title *al-Tābīʿūn*: the Successors, or Followers. They are conventionally divided into several classes according to the ranking of the Companions from whom they learnt and related traditions. Al-Ḥākim has grouped them into no fewer than fifteen classes, of which he explicitly mentions only four. Ibn Saʿd identifies nine classes. But the majority of the later writers on *asmāʾ al-rijāl* (biographical information on narrators) have classified them into three classes only:

- (a) The students of the Companions who accepted Islam before the Conquest of Mecca.
- (b) The students of the Companions who embraced Islam after the conquest of Mecca.
- (c) The students of such Companions as were not yet adults at the time of the Prophet's death.

Of these Successors, the earliest to die is said to have been Zayd ibn Maʿmar ibn Zayd, who was killed in one of the Persian wars in the thirtieth year of the Muslim era, while the last is said to have been Khalaf ibn Khalīfa, who died in 180AH.⁸ Upon them, therefore, devolved the preservation and propagation of *ḥadīth* for over a century, firstly in association with the Companions, and, when the latter had passed away, with the help of their own disciples. The pupils of the Successors are themselves called 'Successors of the Successors' (*atbāʾ al-tābīʿīn*), some of whom are said to have lived until about the end of the first quarter of the third Muslim century,⁹ before the end of which almost all the important works of the *ḥadīth* literature were compiled.

3.2 THE TRADITIONISTS' ATTITUDE TO ḤADĪTH

These descending generations shared in common an astonishing zeal for the pursuit of *ḥadīth*. Rich men and women among them sacrificed their wealth for its sake, while the poor devoted their lives to it in spite of their poverty.

We have already seen that so great was the Companions' devotion to the

ḥadīth that 'Umar feared that the Qur'ān itself might be neglected.¹⁰ After the death of the Companions, however, the Successors and their disciples propagated *ḥadīth* with unabated vigour. Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri (d.124/741), for instance, 'spent money like water' for the sake of *ḥadīth*; he is said to have been so busy with his books that his wife declared that having three co-wives would be preferable to enduring his love for books.¹¹ Rabi'a (d.136/753) spent all he possessed in his search for *ḥadīths*, and in the end had to sell the beams of the roof of his house and live on the rotten dates which were discarded by the people of Medina.¹² Ibn al-Mubārak spent 40,000 dirhams during his quest for *ḥadīths*,¹³ while Yahyā ibn Ma'in (d.233/847) spent 150,000 dirhams which he had inherited from his father, so that he ended up without even a pair of shoes to wear.¹⁴ 'Alī ibn 'Āṣim spent 100,000 dirhams,¹⁵ al-Dhahabī spent 150,000 dirhams;¹⁶ Ibn Rustam, 300,000,¹⁷ and Hishām ibn 'Ubayd Allāh (d.221/835), 700,000 dirhams,¹⁸ all in the search for *ḥadīth*. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī gave away 200 gold coins to those who devoted their lives to *ḥadīth*.¹⁹ There is no shortage of anecdotes of this type in the books of *asmā' al-rijāl*.

Such of the Traditionists, however, as were not born with silver spoons in their mouths did not abandon their study of the subject in despair. On the contrary, they carried on their pursuit of it with remarkable assiduity. Ibn Abi Dhi'b (d.159/775) for instance, in his thirst for knowledge had to fast uninterruptedly for days and nights on account of his poverty.²⁰ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, despite his indigence, stayed at Baṣra for fourteen years in order to study *ḥadīth*. During this period he was obliged on one occasion to sell his clothes in order to earn his livelihood.²¹ Even al-Shāfi'i, eponymous founder of a great law school, wrote some of the *ḥadīths* which he had learnt on pieces of bone, which he kept in a bag, because in his student days he was too poor to buy paper.²² Bukhārī, the famous traditionist, is said to have lived on wild herbs and grasses for three days on one occasion during his peregrinations in search of *ḥadīth*.²³ As a matter of fact, it seems that most of the *ḥadīth* scholars were poor, perhaps because many important theorists of *ḥadīth* science have held that poverty and a readiness to suffer are indispensable conditions for the acquisition of knowledge.²⁴

It is scarcely possible to guess at the total number of *ḥadīth*-seekers who flourished during the various periods of Muslim history. Among the Companions, Abū Hurayra is said to have related *ḥadīths* to over eight hundred students. At Kūfa alone, when Ibn Sirīn visited that town, there lived some four thousand students of *ḥadīth*.²⁵ At Medina, more than 300 students were associated with the great Abū Zinād (d.132);²⁶ and later on, the door of Mālik ibn Anas turned into a rendezvous for a great crowd of students,

who sometimes even quarrelled among themselves for a seat near the Imām at his lectures.²⁷ The discourses of ‘Alī ibn ‘Aṣim on *ḥadīth* were attended, it is said, by more than 30,000 students;²⁸ those of Sulaymān ibn Ḥarb by 40,000;²⁹ those of Yazīd ibn Hārūn by 70,000;³⁰ and those of Abū Muslim al-Kajjī by an immensely large number, of whom only those who used ink-pots for taking down notes were estimated at more than forty thousand.³¹

The attendance of such astonishingly large numbers of people at *ḥadīth* lectures may be better envisaged if we bear in mind some of the techniques of instruction which were commonly used. The most efficient such method, known as *samā‘* (Hearing), includes *imlā‘* (Dictation), and consists of the recitation of *ḥadīths* by the teacher to his students.³² In order to do this well, the teacher is advised to purify himself of all worldly thoughts, wear clean garments, and appoint some scholars well-versed in *ḥadīth* to keep order among the students and to repeat his recitations to any students who might be sitting too far for his words to carry. The lecturer should stand up, in an elevated place; and he should recite every word of each tradition distinctly, loudly and slowly, so that the students might be able to write it down. The various reproducers should repeat exactly, distinctly, slowly and loudly the words of the lecturer to the nearby students. We are told that Abū Muslim al-Kajjī appointed seven reproducers for the lectures he delivered in Baghdad. At the end of one such lecture, the area vacated by the students was measured, their ink-pots were counted, and after careful calculation it was determined that over forty thousand people had been present.³³

The number of traditionists who had mastered the subject and were accepted as authorities on it also appears to have been large. At Medina alone, when Imām Mālik went there to study *ḥadīth*, there lived seventy traditionists who had associated with the Companions and had learnt *ḥadīths* from them.³⁴ In Baghdad alone there lived some eight hundred shaykhs at the end of the second century AH.

3.3 THE CRISIS OF AUTHENTICITY

The above provides an indication of the great interest which *ḥadīth* scholarship aroused in the classical Islamic world. It was inevitable, however, that not all these students should have been intellectually or morally competent to take up this great task. All the Islamic authorities agree that an enormous amount of forgery was committed in the *ḥadīth* literature.³⁵ Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal has said that *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* have been more affected by

forgery than any other branch of literature. The very existence of a copious literature on *mauḍūʿāt* (forged traditions) reminds us of this consciousness.

It is interesting, but not easy, to try to determine the period when forgery in *ḥadīth* began. The Victorian writer William Muir thought that it began during the caliphate of ʿUthmān.³⁶ It is more likely, however, that it originated during the lifetime of the Prophet himself. His opponents would not have missed the opportunity to forge and attribute words and deeds to him for which he was not responsible, in order to rouse the Arab tribes against his teachings. Ibn Ḥazm, for one, accepts this explanation, and cites one incident which took place in Prophetic Medina. After the *hijra*, he tells us, a man went to an outlying district of Medina and told a tribe living there that the Prophet had given him authority over them. He resorted to this device because he was of a mind to marry a girl who was a member of that tribe, to whom he had proposed marriage before the *hijra*, but who had not consented. The tribe sent a messenger to the Prophet to make enquiries concerning the 'authority' thus asserted in his name. The Prophet told them that the man was a pretender, and had received no warrant for what he did.³⁷

During the caliphate of Abū Bakr, too, when apostasy had raised its head, it is not unlikely that some of the apostates should have forged such traditions as suited their purpose; and it may be for this reason that Abū Bakr and ʿUmar were so strict in accepting traditions which were reported to them.³⁸

During the caliphate of ʿUthmān, this kind of dishonesty became more common. Some members of the factions into which the community was then divided forged traditions in order to advance their faction's interests. During the first century of Islam, and also thereafter, the various political parties, the heretics, the professional preachers, and even a number of sincere Muslims, all made their contributions to the growing rubbish-heap of false traditions.

As we have seen, during the period following the Prophet's death many Companions were criticised by their friends for their seeming carelessness and want of insight into what they related of the Prophet.³⁹ Among the Successors and their Successors, with the rise of the 'jarring sects and parties', the number of careless and insincere students and teachers increased markedly. Some of these men and women were careless in their choice of teachers, others made *bona fide* mistakes in relating to their students what they had learnt. Still others, however, made deliberate changes to the text or the *isnād* of certain *ḥadīths*, and fabricated others from scratch for the sake of personal or sectarian gain, or—more perversely—with the pious intention of calling people to the path of God and the liberating teachings of religion.⁴⁰

In this way there developed among the Muslims a large number of forged traditions, which are conventionally attributed to four categories of people.

(a) Heretics (*zanādiqa*), often of Manichean leanings, who flourished under various banners during early Islamic history, and who wrought havoc by wilfully forging thousands of traditions and propagating them among the Muslim community.⁴¹ 'The *zanādiqa*', remarked Ḥammād ibn Zayd, 'have invented fourteen thousand traditions in the name of the Prophet.'⁴² To name only a few, one could cite 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Abī'l-Awja', Bayyān ibn Sam'ān, and Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd, the first of whom alone had forged some four thousand traditions in the name of the Prophet of Islam.⁴³ Another heretic who was actually caught, sentenced and executed by order of Hārūn al-Rashīd is said to have confessed to the forgery of a thousand *ḥadīths*.⁴⁴

(b) The *zanādiqa*, however, proved unable to do much damage to the traditions of Islam, being known and recognised as anti-Islamic. A more malign threat to the integrity of the literature was presented by certain pious Muslims. The various factional and sectarian preachers at both the Shī'ī and Khārījī ends of the political spectrum, and various sycophantic seekers after caliphal favours, proved more dangerous than any outright heretics.⁴⁵ These Muslims, with their avowed profession of the faith of Islam, could not be expected to attribute their own forgeries to their own Prophet. Yet the hope of immediate gain has often proved a greater force than truth and scholarship. We are told, for instance, that al-Muḥallab (d.83/702), the great general and adversary of the Khawārij, confessed that he had forged traditions against them.⁴⁶ 'Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam (d.158/774) and others who belonged to the Umayyad party concocted pro-Umayyad traditions.⁴⁷ Abu'l-'Aynā' Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim, likewise, forged *ḥadīths* which supported the claims of the 'Alid party.⁴⁸ Al-Ṭalqānī (d.310/922), an important member of the Murji'ite sect, forged *ḥadīths* which justified his sect's doctrines.⁴⁹ Ghiyāth ibn Ibrāhīm, a courtier of al-Mahdī, made intentional changes in *ḥadīth* to please the Caliph.⁵⁰ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.150/767) expressed to the same caliph his readiness to invent some traditions eulogising al-'Abbās, the forefather of the caliph.⁵¹ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan concocted a number of traditions praising 'Ā'isha and in favour of the Sunnīs.⁵² Most of the traditions which extol the virtues of certain individuals, tribes, provinces districts or towns, or a sectarian leader, owe their origin to some of these deliberate forgers, and have been identified by the *ḥadīth* scholars as mere inventions.⁵³

(c) The *Quṣṣās* (storytellers). Though much humbler in status than the leaders of parties or sects, these were scarcely less dangerous than the latter

for the integrity of the Islamic sources. Their main business at first was to relate moral stories following the morning and evening prayers, to encourage people to do good deeds.⁵⁴ Their origin may be traced back to the time of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who is said to have permitted either Tamīm al-Dārī⁵⁵ or Ubayd ibn 'Umayr⁵⁶ to relate edifying tales before the people. Mu'āwīya, founder of the Umayyad dynasty, gave such men the title of 'ordinary storytellers'—i.e., as opposed to the 'special storytellers' who were appointed by the Caliph himself in order to counteract the propaganda of his opponents.⁵⁷

These storytellers, among whom may be included the common street-preachers who held no official position, had to deal with the credulous common people, who appreciated amusing stories and fables more than hard facts. They soon proliferated, spreading through Iraq and Central Asia, and adapted themselves to their audiences, which contained people who found their words more congenial than the learned discourses of the scholars. At a relatively early date⁵⁸ they seem to have allowed themselves to degenerate into fablemongers, whose main object was to please their public and extract gold from their pockets. To this end, they invented thousands of such amusing anecdotes as might appeal to the masses, attributed them to the Prophet, and related them publicly. One of them, for instance, related to an audience, on the authority of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Yaḥyā ibn Ma'in, that when a man said *lā ilāha illa' Llāh*, God created from each letter a bird with a beak of gold and feathers of pearl. At the end of his sermon, the man was questioned by Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Ma'in, who had been among his listeners, and who objected that they had never related such a tradition. The storyteller tried to silence his critics by making fun of them.⁵⁹ Another *qāṣṣ* related to a mosque audience a series of traditions on the authority of Harim ibn Ḥayyān (d.46/666), and when he was challenged by the latter, he claimed that he had been referring to another *ḥadīth* expert by that name. 'As a matter of fact,' said the undaunted storyteller, 'fifteen persons by the name of Harim are present in this very mosque.'⁶⁰ Kulthūm ibn 'Amr al-ʿAttābī once collected a crowd round himself in a mosque, and related to them—with a full *isnād*—a *ḥadīth* saying that he who touched the tip of his nose with his tongue might rest assured that he would never go to Hell. The audience showed their readiness to accept this forgery as a genuine tradition—by trying to ascertain their fate in this way.⁶¹

So extreme was the self-regard of many *quṣṣāṣ* that not only did they fail to feel ashamed of forging traditions in the name of the Prophet for their own personal gain, but they felt no compunction in attacking other storytellers. A proverb says, 'One storyteller does not love another.' But sometimes in order

to do mischief to the people and gain their own ends, two storytellers would work together to forge traditions. In this way, one of them once stood up at the end of a street narrating traditions in praise of 'Alī, while the other stood up at the other end extolling the virtues of Abū Bakr. Thus did they make money from both the Shī'a and the Nāṣibīs, and at the end of the day divided the proceeds equally among themselves.⁶²

Their activities were so dangerous for the traditions of Islam as well as for the government, that Mālik ibn Anas did not allow them into the mosque at Medina.⁶³ The best-known traditionists condemned them, and in the year 279/892 their activities were banned in Baghdad.⁶⁴

(d) But perhaps the most dangerous type of *ḥadīth* forgers came from the ranks of the devout traditionists themselves. Their sincerity and love for the traditions of Islam could not be doubted. But it has rightly been observed, by an eminent English writer, that 'everyone kills the object of his love'. Many pious traditionists attempted, unwittingly, to kill the science of Tradition by forging *ḥadīths*, ascribing them to the Prophet, and spreading them abroad among the Muslim community.⁶⁵

Nūḥ ibn Abī Maryam, who had studied theology with scholars of great repute, was known as *al-Jāmi'* on account of his vast and varied learning. He acted as judge at Merv during the reign of al-Manṣūr. He related traditions describing the virtues of the various chapters of the Qur'ān. But when he was pressed for the authorities from whom he had received these traditions, he confessed that he had forged them for the sake of God, and to attract people to His Book.⁶⁶ Abān ibn Abī 'Ayyāsh, who was one of the most godly people of his time, was severely censured by Shu'ba ibn al-Ḥajjāj, and more than 1,500 traditions narrated by him on the authority of Anas were found to have no foundation.⁶⁷ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Bāhili (d.275/888) was generally venerated for his piety, but when Abū Daūd looked into four hundred traditions which were related by him, he found that they were all forged. Aḥmad himself confessed to having forged traditions in order to make the hearts of the people tender and soft (*tarqīq al-qulūb*).⁶⁸ Sulaymān ibn 'Amr was a contemporary of Ibn Ḥanbal, and would fast by day and offer prayers by night, outdoing in this many of his contemporaries. But he is characterised none the less by the critics as a liar and forger of traditions.⁶⁹ Wahb ibn Ḥafṣ was generally regarded as a virtuous Muslim: his asceticism was so acute that it is said that for twenty years he did not speak to anyone. Yet none the less, he did not hesitate to forge traditions.⁷⁰ These and many other well-intentioned and outwardly pious Muslims, such as Maysara ibn 'Abd Rabbih the Persian;⁷¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥarb (d.234/848), the 'man of piety';⁷² 'Ubad ibn Kuthayr (d.150/767);⁷³ 'Abd Allāh ibn Ayyūb;⁷⁴

Hushaym ibn Bashīr (d.183/799);⁷⁵ Ziyād ibn ‘Abd Allāh;⁷⁶ and the followers of Muḥammad ibn Karrām al-Sijistānī⁷⁷ held that it was permissible to forge traditions in order to attract people to good deeds and warn them against evil.

These four types of forger, then, wrought havoc with the literature. Their activities were often very extensive indeed: we are told that Muḥammad ibn ‘Ukkāsha and Muḥammad ibn Tamīm forged more than 10,000 traditions.⁷⁸ Abū Sa‘īd ibn Ja‘far forged more than 300 traditions in the name of Abū Ḥanīfa alone.⁷⁹ Aḥmad al-Qaysī concocted more than three thousand traditions.⁸⁰ Aḥmad al-Marwazī forged more than 10,000.⁸¹ Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Jubārī forged thousands of traditions.⁸² Furthermore, a large number of other forgers—like Ziyād ibn Maymūn,⁸³ Shurayk ibn ‘Abd Allāh,⁸⁴ and Ṭalḥa ibn ‘Amr⁸⁵—invented thousands of false *ḥadīths*, some of which are quoted in sermons and declaimed from the pulpits even today.

3.4 CRITICAL TRADITIONISTS

Despite this process, however, there existed a core of honest and committed scholars who regarded the fabrication of evidence about the Prophet as a sure path to hellfire. Such men and women dedicated their lives to authentic scholarship, carefully ascertaining what was authentic, preserving its purity and genuineness, and propagating it among the community at large. They regarded it neither as a pastime nor a source of income, nor a means of underpinning any particular doctrinal or legal school. For them, knowledge was an end, not a means. As Sufyān al-Thawrī described it, *ḥadīth* for them had become like an infection, against which they could do nothing.⁸⁶

During the early period of Islamic history, when the Companions still lived, an intense scrupulousness was maintained.⁸⁷ Among the Successors (*tābi‘ūn*), a large number of whom flourished during the second half of the first and the first half of the second Islamic century, Ibn Abī Laylā (20/641–83/702), Rajā’ ibn Ḥayawayh (d.112/730), Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn (35/655–115/728), Abū Zinād (d.132/749), Yaḥyā ibn Sa‘īd (d.143/760), and an army of others had been intensely honest and strict with regard to the authorities from whom they received the traditions of their beloved Prophet. Ibn Abī Laylā used to say that one could not be credited with knowledge of *ḥadīth* until one was able to reject some of them and accept others.⁸⁸ Qāsim, Rajā’ and Ibn Sīrīn had been scrupulously honest about every word of each *ḥadīth* which they acquired,⁸⁹ while the latter declared that *ḥadīth* was religion, and warned that people should be careful about those from whom

they received it.⁹⁰ Ṭāūs ibn Kaysān of the Yemen counselled students to learn *ḥadīth* from pious people only,⁹¹ while Abu'l-ʿĀliya relates that whenever a seeker after *ḥadīth* went to any traditionist to learn it from him, he enquired first about the piety of his would-be teacher.⁹² Al-Zuhri was of the opinion that the *isnād* was indispensable to a *ḥadīth*.⁹³ Abū Zinād states that when he went to Medina in order to learn *ḥadīth*, he found there one hundred traditionists who were considered reliable in ordinary matters, but unreliable as teachers of *ḥadīth*, apparently because they did not achieve the high standard of honesty which was expected from the teachers of traditions.⁹⁴ Ismāʿīl ibn Ibrāhīm says that only traditions related by people strict in the performance of religion should be considered for acceptance.⁹⁵

The spirit of scrupulous care with regard to choice of teachers among the Successors was imbibed by their students, and kept up by a large number of them throughout the period of their florescence. Among them, Mālik ibn Anas (93-179/711-795), on going to Medina in search of *ḥadīth*, found in the mosque seventy traditionists who had acquired their knowledge directly from the Companions and Successors; but he none the less accepted traditions only from such of them as were demonstrably trustworthy, and whenever he had any doubts about any part of a tradition, he gave up the whole of it as unreliable.⁹⁶ He held that one should not accept *ḥadīths* related by the light-witted, or persons who held erroneous views and propagated them, nor persons who commonly told lies (even if they were not accused of it in connection with *ḥadīth*), or people unfamiliar with the subject matter of the material which they related, however pious, honest and eminent they might appear.⁹⁷

Many of Mālik's contemporaries shared his punctilious care over the authorities from whom they received their material. These contemporaries included Shuʿba ibn al-Ḥajjāj (83/702-160/776), Sufyān al-Thawrī (97/715-161/777), Ḥammād ibn Salama (d.167/783), Ḥammād ibn Zayd (98/716-179/795), ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak (121/738-181-797), al-Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyād (d.187/802), Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd al-Qaṭṭān (120/737-198/813), and many others.

This careful scrutiny of those who related traditions was continued with unabated vigour by a large number of the students of *ḥadīth* in the subsequent generations. Al-Shāfiʿī (156/767-204/819), a student of Mālik, and the founder of one of the most important schools of Islamic law, made a careful inspection of the reliability not only of those from whom he himself received traditions, but also of their authorities.⁹⁸ He even rejected the *mursal* traditions of al-Zuhri.⁹⁹ Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn (d.156/772-233/847) did not include any *ḥadīths* in his works unless they were supported by thirty

independant chains of authority.¹⁰⁰ Ibrāhīm ibn Saʿīd claimed to have included in his collections only such traditions as were supported by a hundred *isnāds*.¹⁰¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's care about his authorities is well-known: even on his deathbed he did not neglect to ask his son to strike off a *ḥadīth* from his great *Musnad* because it was contrary to many more reliable traditions.¹⁰² Al-Bukhārī's scrupulous honesty and exactitude are celebrated, while Muslim's scrutiny of narrators is clearly shown in his advanced introduction to his great work. Abū Daūd al-Sijistānī (200/835–275/910), al-Tirmidhī (d.279/892), al-Nasāʾī (d.302/914), Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224/839–310/922), ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Baghawī (214/830–317/929) and a vast number of others, were unquestionably sincere, honest and scholarly in their pursuit and propagation of the Prophetic *ḥadīth*.

Thanks to the precision and rigour of the elite of traditionists, then, the vital core of the *ḥadīth* literature was preserved intact. As Abbott concludes:

Deliberate tampering with either the content or the *isnāds* of the Prophet's Tradition, as distinct from the sayings and deeds of the Companions and Successors, may have passed undetected by ordinary transmitters, but not by the aggregate of the ever-watchful, basically honest, and aggressively outspoken master traditionists and *ḥadīth* critics.¹⁰³

3.5 THE SCIENCE OF RIJĀL DEVELOPS

Such sincere enthusiasts for the literature were not content with the mere scrutiny of the *ḥadīth* reporters. They also attempted to publicise to the whole Islamic community the character of those responsible for forgery, or for incompetent and erroneous reporting. During the early period, when Companions still lived, Ibn ʿUmar had not hesitated to point out Abū Hurayra's personal interest in a controversy over field-dogs.¹⁰⁴ Murra al-Ḥamdānī (d.71/690) expressed a desire to kill a man known as al-Ḥārith, who had been fabricating *ḥadīth*, while Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d.96/714) warned his pupils about al-Ḥārith, and also asked them to keep away from al-Mughīra ibn Saʿīd and Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, who were liars.¹⁰⁵ Qatāda (d.117/735) pointed out to his students the false presumptions of a contemporary scholar, while the blind Ibn ʿAwn (d.151/768), on being questioned about a *ḥadīth* related to him by Shahr, stressed his unreliability.¹⁰⁶ Sufyān al-Thawrī, Shuʿba, Mālik and Ibn ʿUyayna all instructed people to make the true nature of unreliable narrators known to the public.¹⁰⁷ As a matter of

fact, numerous Companions and Successors had criticised various reporters of the traditions; and Shu'ba and Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd, who are generally said to have been the first critics of the reporters,¹⁰⁸ had only made special efforts with regard to their criticism.¹⁰⁹ Ibn 'Adī (277/890–360/970), while describing his predecessors in the field of the criticism of *ḥadīth* reporters, mentions the names of Ibn 'Abbās, 'Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit, and Anas (all Companions), together with al-Sha'bī, Ibn Sīrīn and Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib (all Successors). He also remarks that the number of critics of *rijāl* in the earliest period was comparatively small because of the small number of weak reporters, and the reduced chances of mistakes and forgeries. When, towards the middle of the second century, less acceptable narrators increased in number, a group of important traditionists discussed the subject, and debated the integrity and reliability of the various reporters.¹¹⁰

This core of leading scholars was guided in its pursuit of *ḥadīth* neither by the government and the many sectarian leaders, nor their own personal interests, but 'by the pure love of pure traditions'. The Umayyads and Abbasids made little difference to them. Under the Abbasids, who tried to reconcile them by their outward show of love for religion, the traditionists continued their strict neutrality towards the government of the day and the endlessly warring factions which were competing for power. Of the 'Three 'Abd Allāhs' who are often considered the pillars of *ḥadīth*, the son of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb took no part in civil strife, and rejected out of hand Marwān's suggestion that he make a bid for the Caliphate.¹¹¹ Ibn 'Abbās held to a strict neutrality in the fight for the caliphate between Ibn al-Zubayr and 'Abd al-Malik.¹¹² 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ went to the field of *Ṣiffin* at the insistence of his father, but took no part in the battle between Mu'āwiya and 'Alī, and for the remainder of his days repented of having even gone to the field.¹¹³ Abū Dharr,¹¹⁴ Muḥammad ibn Maslama,¹¹⁵ Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib,¹¹⁶ Abū'l-Āliya,¹¹⁷ al-Muṭarrif,¹¹⁸ al-Ḥasan ibn Yasār,¹¹⁹ Masrūq,¹²⁰ and many other Companions and Successors kept entirely out of politics. Some preferred prison and torture to lending support to any of the warring factions against their own conviction. Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib, for instance, was flogged by Ibn al-Zubayr, and was put to torture by Hishām ibn Ismā'il, who wanted him to declare for 'Abd Allāh or the sons of 'Abd al-Malik. Yaḥyā ibn Abī Kathīr (d.129/746) was severely tortured for condemning the Umayyads.¹²¹ Ubayd Allāh ibn Rāfi was beaten at the orders of 'Amr ibn Sa'īd.¹²² Imām Mālik was whipped on the orders of al-Manṣūr, because some of his legal judgements did not suit the Caliph.¹²³ The same caliph ordered the execution of the great Sufyān al-Thawrī.¹²⁴

The unpleasant and heated conversations between al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays

and Mu'āwiya,¹²⁵ between al-A'mash and 'Abd al-Malik,¹²⁶ between Sālim and Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik,¹²⁷ between Abū Hāzim and the same caliph,¹²⁸ between al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and 'Umar ibn Hubayra,¹²⁹ and between al-Awzā'i and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alī,¹³⁰ clearly show the highly strained relationship between the orthodox traditionists and the Umayyad and Abbasid potentates. Under the Abbasids, too, many scrupulous and orthodox scholars (such as Abū Ḥanīfa,¹³¹ Sufyān al-Thawrī,¹³² and others), continued their attitude of indifference towards the caliphs and their government. Some of these scholars, such as Ibn Ḥanbal,¹³³ Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād,¹³⁴ Yūsuf ibn Sa'īd,¹³⁵ Abū Mush'ir,¹³⁶ and others, refused to agree with the Mu'tazilite views of the caliph al-Ma'mūn, and suffered imprisonment and physical punishment. Refusing to compromise with tyrants was a stated principle with them:¹³⁷ and hence we discover that very few of the compilers of the great *ḥadīth* collections which are now accepted in the Muslim world were in the pay of the caliphs, or welcomed at their court.

3.6 TRAVELLING (RIḤLA) IN SEARCH OF ḤADĪTH

The Prophet himself recommended travelling in search of knowledge, in a number of sayings which are to be found in several of the important *ḥadīth* collections. Some of the Companions undertook long journeys either to learn a *ḥadīth*, or to refresh their memories of it. Abū Ayyūb, for instance, travelled from Medina to Egypt just for the sake of refreshing his memory on a *ḥadīth* which he—together with 'Uqba ibn 'Āmir—had learnt from the Prophet himself.¹³⁸ Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh travelled for a whole month in order to hear from 'Abd Allāh ibn Unays only one *ḥadīth*, which Jābir had already learnt through another person.¹³⁹ Similarly, another Companion went from Medina to Damascus only for the purpose of hearing from the lips of Abu'l-Dardā' a *ḥadīth* which he had already received indirectly from him through one of his friends.¹⁴⁰

The precepts of the Prophet, and the example of his Companions, also deeply impressed the Successors, who spared no pains in their pursuit of knowledge. They travelled throughout the expanding Islamic world to gather knowledge of as many *ḥadīths* as possible, and returned home 'like bees laden with honey', to impart the precious store they had accumulated to the crowds of their eager disciples.¹⁴¹

Makhḥūl (d. 112/730) travelled through Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the Ḥijāz, and gathered the knowledge of all the *ḥadīth* which he could obtain from the Companions who still lived in those places.¹⁴² He used to boast that for the

sake of knowledge he had 'travelled round the world'.¹⁴³ Al-Sha'bī (d.104/722) said when asked how he had gathered the knowledge of such a voluminous quantity of *ḥadīths*: 'By hard work, long travels, and great patience.'¹⁴⁴ He used to remark that if for the sake of only one word of wisdom anyone travelled from one end of Syria to the furthest corner of the Yemen, he (al-Sha'bī) would not consider his journey to have been wasted.¹⁴⁵ Masrūq (d.63/682) travelled so widely for the sake of learning that he was known as 'Abu'l-Safar' ('the traveller'). Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib (d.94/712) used to travel for days to learn a single *ḥadīth*.¹⁴⁶

Such journeys became increasingly popular. 'From one end of the Islamic world to the other, from al-Andalus to Central Asia,' says one European scholar,

wandered diligent men gathering traditions in order to be able to pass them on to their audiences. This was the only possible way of obtaining in their authentic form traditions which were scattered in the most diverse provinces. The honorific *al-rahḥāla* or *al-jawwāl* is hardly ever absent from the names of traditionists of recognised importance. The title *ṭawwāf al-aqālīm*, wanderer in all zones, is no mere hyperbole for these travellers, who included people who could say of themselves that they had traversed the East and West four times. These men do not travel in all these countries in order to see the world or gain experience but only to see the preservers of traditions in all these places and to hear and profit by them, 'like the bird who alights on no tree without picking at the leaves'.¹⁴⁷

These seekers of *ḥadīth* gathered their knowledge from every source of which they were aware, and took from each source all that they could extract from it. This is apparent from the large number of teachers which some of them had, and from the considerable periods of time which some of them spent with their preceptors. Abū Ishāq al-Sabī'ī (d.126/743), for instance, learnt *ḥadīth* from between three hundred and four hundred teachers;¹⁴⁸ Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak (d.181/797) from 1,100;¹⁴⁹ Mālik ibn Anas from 900;¹⁵⁰ Hishām ibn 'Abd Allāh from 1,700;¹⁵¹ Abū Nu'aym from 700 or 800;¹⁵² Ibn 'Asākir from 1,300 traditionists.¹⁵³ Al-Zuhri kept the company of Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib for ten years.¹⁵⁴ Ḥarīmād ibn Zayd was with Ayyūb for 20 years;¹⁵⁵ Rabī' ibn Anas went regularly to the sessions of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī for a similar period.¹⁵⁶ Amr ibn Zirrā associated with Ibn 'Ulayya for 23 years.¹⁵⁷ Ibn Jurayj kept the company of 'Aṭā' for 18 years; while Thābit ibn Aslam studied *ḥadīth* with Imām Mālik for no less than forty years.¹⁵⁸

Thus, through the energy and scrupulousness of the Successors and the later generations of Muslims, were collected together the reports of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet which had been scattered throughout the length and breadth of the Islamic world. The first organised attempt at their collection, as we have seen, was made at the end of the first century by the caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. Reports concerning his activities in connection with the collection of *ḥadīths* are found in many important early works, including the *Muwatta'* of Imām Mālik, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, and the *Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd. Although these reports differ of course in certain minor details, the main features of the process are agreed upon by them all.

Once begun, the collection of *ḥadīths* accelerated rapidly. Within two hundred years almost all the important *ḥadīth* works were assembled, most of which were produced by honest and scrupulous scholars with no attachment to the proliferating political groups and sects, and even less interest in worldly gain. These scholars traced the lives and discussed the characters of all the reporters of traditions, and produced, side by side with their collections of *ḥadīth*, a vast literature on the reporters as an aid to the formal criticism of *ḥadīth*.

CATEGORIES OF ḤADĪTH COLLECTIONS

4.1 BEGINNINGS

THE origins of the *ḥadīth* literature are to be traced back to the letters, laws and treaties which were dictated to scribes by the Prophet himself. They are likewise to be traced back to numerous *ṣaḥīfas*, documents which were compiled by the Companions and Followers, and to some of which reference has already been made.¹

The discovery of the *ṣaḥīfa* of Hammām ibn Munabbih, which has been published by Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, reveals the nature and character of these *ṣaḥīfas*. It proves that they were more than simple memoranda, but were complete records of certain of the sayings of the Prophet, presented in the form familiar to us from the later collections of *ḥadīth*.

Even before the arrival of Islam, Arabic literature possessed some 'books', which introduced a new type of literary spirit among the Arabs.² It has already been proved that books were assembled on many branches of Arabic literature during the second half of the first Islamic century.³ During the reign of Mu'āwiya, 'Ābid ibn Sharya wrote a book on the pre-Islamic kings of Arabia,⁴ which enjoyed some popularity during the tenth century CE.⁵ Suḥar ibn al-'Abbās, who lived during the reign of the same caliph, wrote a collection of proverbs.⁶ Theodocus, a physician at the court of al-Ḥajjāj, wrote some Arabic books on medicine.⁷ Abān collected materials for a book on *maghāzī*,⁸ while 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, who died towards the end of the first Hijra century, is said to have written a book on the same subject. 'Although nowhere in the older sources,' says one European writer, 'is it said that 'Urwa composed an actual book on

the *Maghāzī*, it is none the less certain that he collected and set forth a series of the most important events in the Prophet's life.⁹ The same collector of *maghāzī* also compiled some books on *fiqh* which he burnt on the day of the Battle of the Harra.¹⁰ It is easy to understand, then, that the Muslims did not neglect the collection of accounts of the words and states of the Prophet, whose example they regarded as divinely inspired.

The early sources of *ḥadīth* fall into three distinct groups. Firstly, there are the books on *maghāzī* (almost synonymous with *sīra*)—such as those of Ibn Ishāq and others—in which most of the *ḥadīths* of a historical nature are to be found. Secondly, there are books on *fiqh*, such as the *Muwattaʿa* of Imām Mālik and the *Kitāb al-Umm* of Imām al-Shāfiʿī, which contain a large number of legal *ḥadīths*, cited in the context of legal discussions and mingled with other, non-Prophetic, *sunnas*. Finally, there are works which set out to be collections of *ḥadīth* as such. It is these latter which will be dealt with in this chapter.

4.2 THE MUSNADS

Of all the various types of large *ḥadīth* collections, the *musnads* appear to be the earliest in origin. Yet many of those which are generally ascribed to certain of the early authorities on *ḥadīth* were in fact compiled by later traditionists, who collected *ḥadīths* which were related to them by, or on the authority of, any one important narrator. Such are the *Musnads* of Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Shāfiʿī, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, and others, none of whom is in reality known to have compiled a *musnad* work. The *Musnad* which is generally known as that of Abū Ḥanīfa was compiled by Abu'l-Muʿayyad Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Khwārizmī (d.665/1257).¹¹ The *Musnad* of al-Shāfiʿī was compiled on the basis of his *Kitāb al-Umm* by Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Aṣamm (d.246/860).¹² The work known as the *Musnad* of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was compiled by al-Bāghandī (d.282/895).¹³ The *Musnad* of Abū Daūd al-Ṭayālīsī, which is considered to be the earliest *musnad* still extant,¹⁴ was not compiled in its present form by Ṭayālīsī himself, but by a traditionist working in Khurasān at a later date.¹⁵

4.2a THE MUSNAD OF AL-ṬAYĀLISĪ

An old, rare and important manuscript of this work is preserved in the Oriental Public Library of Patna, and has been fully described by Maulawī ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd in the catalogue of the *ḥadīth* mss kept at the O.P. Library at

Bankipore.¹⁶ The Hyderabad edition of the *Musnad* has been published on the basis of this manuscript.

Abū Daūd Sulaymān ibn Daūd ibn al-Jārūd al-Ṭayālīsī, to whom the *Musnad* is generally ascribed, was of Persian origin, and was born in the year 133/750. He studied traditions with more than a thousand scholars of his day, among whom many prominent names stand out, including Shu'ba (in whose traditions Ṭayālīsī seems to have specialised), Sufyān al-Thawrī, and others. He had a sharp, retentive memory, and is said to have dictated forty thousand traditions without the help of notes. During his lifetime he came to be accepted as an outstanding authority on *ḥadīth*, and especially on the long *ḥadīths*, so that students flocked to him from all corners of the Islamic world. His teacher Shu'ba, having heard him discuss certain traditions with his students, confessed that he himself could not do better. Strict traditionists like Ibn Ḥanbal and 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī, accepted Ṭayālīsī's authority, and related traditions from him; yet he was none the less not above criticism from some experts, who believed that his memory sometimes failed him. He died in the year 203/813 at the age of 70.¹⁷

In the present printed edition of the *Musnad*,¹⁸ the work consists of 2,767 traditions related by 281 Companions, whose material is given under their names, which are arranged in the following order: (i) the Four Caliphs (ii) the rest of those who fought at Badr (iii) the Emigrants (iv) the Anṣār (v) the women (vi) the youngest Companions.¹⁹ However, Ṭayālīsī, to whom the work is generally ascribed, neither compiled it nor arranged it in its present form. It is rather the work of his student, Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb, who collected together the traditions which he had received from his teacher and arranged them as he saw fit. 'And it was one of the traditionists of Khurasān,' says Ḥājī Khalīfa, 'who collected together the traditions related by Yūsuf [Yūnus] ibn Ḥabīb from Abū Daūd [al-Ṭayālīsī].'²⁰ Ḥājī Khalīfa is right in denying that the *Musnad* was compiled by Ṭayālīsī himself; but he seems to be mistaken in attributing it to the students of Yūnus, for internal evidence shows that Yūnus himself was the compiler.²¹

But whoever its compiler might have been, the text clearly shows that he, as well as the authorities from whom he received its contents, had been careful in handling them. Despite its early date, it carried complete *isnāds*.²² Wherever any doubt exists in the text of a tradition, it has been pointed out. In some cases, various possible readings of certain expressions used in a tradition have been given; in some cases, certain explanatory phrases have been added—care having been taken that these additions might not be mistaken for a part of the text itself.²³ In some cases, it has been pointed out that some of the authorities had doubts with regard to part of the text,²⁴ but

that they dispelled them by referring to some other authorities of their own time.²⁵ If a tradition has been received through more than one source, the fact is pointed out at the end of the tradition. In some cases where the identity of a narrator is doubtful (because more than one narrator bore the same name), an effort has been made to establish his identity.²⁶ In some cases the character of some of the authorities is also mentioned.²⁷ Certain traditions are related from narrators of unknown identity.²⁸ In some cases attention is drawn to the fact that the tradition had been attributed to the Prophet by some narrators, and only to a Companion by others.²⁹

The subject-matters of the traditions contained in the *Musnad* are as varied and numerous as those of any other collection of *ḥadīth*. But those relating to miracles, the personal or tribal virtues of the Companions, and prophecies of future events or sects in Islam, are very few.

The book appears to have enjoyed great popularity until the eighth Islamic century. The Patna manuscript alone bears the names of more than 300 male and female students of *ḥadīth*, who had read it at different periods. Among them are found the names of great traditionists such as al-Dhahabī, al-Mizzī, and others.³⁰ After the eighth century, for whatever reason, it lost its popularity—so much so that manuscripts of the book have become extremely rare.

4.2b THE MUSNAD OF AḤMAD IBN ḤANBAL

The most important and exhaustive of all the *musnad* works available to us is that of Imām Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal al-Marwazī al-Shaybānī. His remarkably saintly, selfless life, and his firm stand for his convictions against the tyrannical inquisition and persecution launched by al-Ma'mūn, and continued by al-Wāthiq and al-Mutawakkil, created a halo of sanctity around his great collection of traditions. Despite its great bulk, it survived the vicissitudes of time, and was printed at Cairo in 1896.³¹

Ibn Ḥanbal was descended from the great Shaybānī tribe of the Arabs. This clan had taken a leading role in the early conquest of Iraq and Khurasān, and in the civil wars which erupted between the Hāshimites and the Umayyads, as partisans of the former. Ibn al-Haytham, a Shaybānī chief at Kūfa, was the first in that town to summon people to the side of 'Alī. Ḥusayn al-Shaybānī was the standard-bearer of the tribe of Rabī'a at the Battle of Ṣiffin; and 'Alī wrote some appreciative verses about his valour.³² Khālīd ibn Ma'mar, also a Shaybānī, had taken a leading part on behalf of 'Alī in the same battle.³³ The sympathy of the Shaybānīs for the Banū Hāshim seems to have continued even after the Umayyads were

well established on the throne. Khālid ibn Ibrāhīm, who succeeded Abū Muslim as governor of Khurasān, had been one of the *naqībs* of the Abbasids against the Umayyad caliphate.³⁴ A certain Ḥayyān al-ʿAṭṭār, mentioned by al-Dīnawarī as one of the main early Abbasid propagandists in Khurasān,³⁵ may be the same Ḥayyān who is mentioned among the forefathers of Ibn Ḥanbal. Certainly, one of Ibn Ḥanbal's progenitors was a general of Khurasān who, according to Patton, fought to overthrow the Umayyads and replace them with the Abbasids.³⁶

Ibn Ḥanbal himself was born in Baghdad in 164/780. He was carefully brought up by his pious mother, his father having died young. There he received his early education with the teachers of the day, beginning the serious study of *ḥadīth* at the age of 15 under Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUlayya.³⁷ After studying with all the major *ḥadīth* experts of the capital, he began to travel in search of knowledge, in the year 183/799. He wandered through Baṣra, Kūfa, the Yemen, the Ḥijāz, and other centres of *ḥadīth* learning, attending the lectures of the traditionists, taking notes, and discussing them with scholars and fellow students, returning finally to Baghdad in around the year 195/810, when he met Imām al-Shāfiʿī, with whom he studied *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*.³⁸

Ibn Ḥanbal appears to have lectured on traditions from an early age. It is said that a large number of students flocked around him in order to hear his lectures on *ḥadīth* in a Baghdad mosque in the year 189/804, when he went there for a short time.³⁹ He made, however, the service and teaching of the Prophet's message the sole object of his life, and continued thus until 218/833, when a storm of persecution erupted against the orthodox theologians throughout the Abbasid empire.

The caliph al-Ma'mūn, under the influence of his philosophically-minded associates, and perhaps wishing to build an intermediate doctrine which would prove acceptable to both Sunnīs and Shī'a, publicly accepted the Mu'tazilite creed, including the notion of the created nature of the Qur'ān. When most scholars refused to join him in his conversion, he threatened, and then persecuted them. Many scholars, however—Imām Aḥmad among them—refused to yield. The caliph, who was then at Tarsus, ordered that they should be put in chains and sent to him. Although these orders were carried out, al-Ma'mūn died before his devout prisoners had reached their destination. This, however, proved of little help to them. The Caliph had made a will wherein he asked his successor to carry out his wishes with regard to the propagation of the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'ān. His two immediate successors, al-Mu'taṣim and al-Wāthiq, carried out this policy with some fierceness, and did not hesitate to use torture and

incarceration to persuade the Muslim scholars of the correctness of the Mu'tazilite system. This *miḥna* (persecution) continued with varying vigour until the third year of the reign of al-Mutawakkil, who, in the year 234/848, put a stop to it, and returned to mainstream Sunni belief.

The charismatic personality of al-Ma'mūn, and the glamour of his court, seems to have secured the conversion of many Muslim theologians to his views. Even such great traditionists as Yaḥyā ibn Ma'īn and 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī sought refuge behind the thin veil of *taqiya* (dissimulation). It was Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal who at this critical juncture proved himself the saviour of Orthodoxy and the Islamic principle of the freedom of faith and conscience. He refused to submit to the dictates of the caliph, attempting to show the fallacies in the reasoning of his adversaries in the public debates, and refused to be impressed by their threats of force, patiently enduring their persecutions. He was kept in a cell for eighteen months; he was whipped by a team of executioners, his wrist was broken, he was badly wounded, and he lost consciousness. None the less, he kept his conscience whole, and emerged from the test with the greatest credit. The prominent Sufi scholar, Bishr ibn al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibī, rightly said that God had cast Ibn Ḥanbal into a fire, and he came out like pure gold. Even more impressively, in the eyes of the community, Ibn Ḥanbal showed an unexampled generosity towards his enemies and persecutors, against none of whom he showed any ill-will. He scrupulously refrained from expressing any opinion against Aḥmad ibn Abī Du'ād, who had taken the part of chief inquisitor against him during the *miḥna*.⁴⁰

After the *miḥna* was over, Imām Aḥmad lived for about eight years. Most of this period, we are told, he devoted to teaching, while the rest he spent in prayers and the remembrance of God.⁴¹ He died in 241/855, at the age of 77. Astonishing scenes of sorrow and mourning followed: not only the great metropolis, but even some of the remotest corners of the Islamic world, fell into a slough of despond. His funeral was attended by a vast crowd said to have contained between 600,000 and two and a half million people. It was an event 'the like of which must rarely have been witnessed anywhere'.⁴²

Throughout his life Ibn Ḥanbal inspired those who knew him with the exemplary probity and mildness of his character. He always refused pecuniary help, whether large or trivial, from rich princes as well as from poor associates and friends.⁴³ He boycotted his sons Ṣāliḥ and 'Abd Allāh because they had accepted stipends from the caliph.⁴⁴ He hated luxury,⁴⁵ and met his few needs from what he himself earned. Though in his religious beliefs he was extremely firm and principled, yet by nature he was very gentle and anxious not to cause harm to anyone.⁴⁶ Honesty and justice were the most admired elements of his character.

Imām Aḥmad's vast and profound knowledge of the traditions, his strictly pious and selfless life, his strong character, his firm and courageous stand for majoritarian Islam against the violence of the caliph, his complete indifference to the court and the courtiers, together with his forceful and inspiring personality, established his reputation as an Imām, and one of the greatest authorities on *ḥadīth* in the Islamic world-community.⁴⁷ 'His personality in his lifetime and after his death,' says Patton, 'was a great force in the Muslim world, and it seems yet to be as powerful in its influence as the principles which he enunciated.'⁴⁸

With the exclusion of part of his final years, Imām Aḥmad devoted his entire life to the service of *ḥadīth*, spreading it through the large regiments of his students to every part of the Muslim world, and writing about various theological problems by presenting the relevant proof-texts from the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. Thirteen of these books are mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm in his *Fihrist*,⁴⁹ while others, such as the *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*, have also been published in his name.

The most important of his works is without question the *Musnad*. The period of its compilation is unknown; but it is clear from its structure as well as its contents that it must have occupied its compilers' mind for a long time. His main object was not to make a collection of all the strictly genuine *ḥadīths*, nor those relating to any particular subject or supporting any particular school of thought. Instead, he attempted to collect all the traditions of the Prophet which, by his criteria, were likely to prove genuine if put to the test, and could therefore serve as a provisional basis for argument. Traditions not included in the *Musnad* have no force, he is reported to have said.⁵⁰ But he never claimed that all its contents were genuine or reliable. On the contrary, he struck off many traditions from his book; and even when he was on his death-bed, he asked his son to delete a *ḥadīth* from the *Musnad*.⁵¹

To assemble his work, Ibn Ḥanbal ransacked his own vast store of knowledge, as well as the entire literature available to him on the subject.⁵² He sifted 30,000 traditions out of some 750,000 narrated by 904 Companions relating to widely varied subjects, such as *maghāzī*, *manāqib*, rituals, laws, prophecies, and so forth.⁵³ However, he read out the various parts of his notes to his students, and also to his sons and nephew over a period of 13 years.⁵⁴ Although he had wanted to assemble his notes in the form of a *Musnad*, death overtook him, so that the task of arranging the material fell to his son 'Abd Allāh, who edited his father's notes.⁵⁵

Ibn Ḥanbal was not strict in the choice of his materials and authorities. He included in his notes material which could not by any definition be included as '*ḥadīth*'. Many of the traditions contained in the *Musnad* were later

declared by traditionists of a later period to be baseless and forged (*mawḍūʿ*),⁵⁶ and many of the narrators relied upon by Ibn Ḥanbal are declared by the authorities on *asmāʾ al-rijāl* to be of dubious worth. Most famous of these is ʿAbd Allāh ibn Lahīʿa (97/715–174/790), over whose credentials a lively controversy continues to rage.⁵⁷

There are, however, many virtues in Ibn Ḥanbal's work. If he receives a *ḥadīth* from more than one narrator, he points out the slightest difference that may exist between them. For instance, in a *ḥadīth* reported to him by Wakīʿ and Abū Muʿāwiya, the former uses the word *Imām*, while the latter uses the word *amīr*, and Ibn Ḥanbal does not fail to point out this discrepancy.⁵⁸ In another *ḥadīth*, two earlier narrators differed in the use of *wa* and *aw*; the author of the *Musnad* records the difference, and gives the two versions which were handed down to him.⁵⁹ In another *ḥadīth*, the difference in the use of *ilayhi* and *ʿalayhi* is pointed out.⁶⁰ If the same narrator reports the same *ḥadīth* with certain differences, it is also pointed out by the Imām; for instance, in a *ḥadīth* narrated by Yazīd ibn Hārūn, the change in his narration from *li-ukhrāhā* to *bi-ukhrāhā* is noted.⁶¹ If any correction or amendment in the text or *isnāds* of a *ḥadīth* was suggested to Imām Aḥmad, he did not fail to make the necessary changes in the manuscript.⁶²

Ibn Ḥanbal's son, ʿAbd Allāh (Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān), maintained the scrupulous care and thoroughness of his father when editing the material he inherited. He collated the whole of his father's huge but incomplete manuscript with his own notes, which he had taken at his lectures and at the sessions of other traditionists. He also collated it with what he had learnt from him and others during more general learned discussions.⁶³

In the case of such *ḥadīths* as ʿAbd Allāh had heard from his father, but which had been deleted from the manuscript, ʿAbd Allāh points out the change that was made to the book.⁶⁴ Where he finds a slip of his father's pen, he corrects it, and reproduces the original in his notes; in some cases, he only points out that there was a mistake in the text.⁶⁵ Where he has any doubt about the text of the manuscript, he frankly expresses it.⁶⁶ In some cases, he adds explanatory notes as well as numerous *ḥadīths* taken from other sources.⁶⁷ In all these cases, he takes great care to ensure that his own additions will not be mistaken by the reader for parts of the manuscript itself. As a matter of fact, he appears to have taken great care to maintain the integrity of his father's text to the greatest degree possible. He reproduces the words written in the original manuscript in separated letters (*muqattaʿāt*), adding a note, saying: 'Thus was it written in the manuscript of my father; but when he read it to us, he pronounced it as one word.'⁶⁸

Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad* occupies an important place in *ḥadīth* literature,

and has served as an important source for various writers on the different genres of Arabic literature. 'Among the *Musnad* works,' remarks one commentator, 'the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal occupies the most stable position. The great esteem enjoyed by his memory in the pious world of Islam, the piety which hallowed his name and which for a long time served as a magic wand against the most stubborn adversary belonging to the Mu'tazili school, and stood as a symbol of Orthodoxy, saved his collection of *ḥadīth* from the complete literary eclipse from which most of the works of the type have suffered. It maintained its position in literature for a long period, as the source for a number of important works and compilations'.⁶⁹

Of the numerous scholars and authors who used the *Musnad* as a subject for their commentary or adaptations, or as a source for their own works or compilations, we may mention here just a few. Abū 'Umar Muḥammad ibn Waḥid (d.345/956) re-edited the book and added certain supplementary traditions.⁷⁰ Al-Bāwari, the lexicographer (d.499/1155), based his *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* entirely on this book.⁷¹ 'Izz al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d.630/1234) used it as one of his sources for his biographical dictionary, the *Usd al-Ghāba*.⁷² Ibn Ḥajar (d.852/1505) included it among the important works upon which he based his *atrāf*.⁷³ Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar ibn al-Mulaqqin (d.805/1402) made a synopsis of it. Al-Suyūṭī (d.911/1505) used it as the basis for his grammatical treatise, *Uqūd al-Zabarjad*.⁷⁴ Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Umar ibn al-Ḥādī al-Sindī (d.1139/1726) wrote a large commentary on it. Zayn al-Dīn 'Umar ibn Aḥmad al-Shammā' al-Ḥalabī made an epitome of it, which he called *al-Muntaqā min Musnad Aḥmad*.⁷⁵ Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh re-edited it, arranging the traditions in the alphabetical order of the names of their original narrators.⁷⁶ Nāṣir al-Dīn ibn Zurayq prepared another edition of it in the form of a *Muṣannaf*, while Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Haythamī compiled together such of its traditions as were not also found in the six canonical traditions.⁷⁷

The *Musnad* did not only serve as a large mine of materials for Muslim theology and Arabic lexicography, but also, because of the pious personality of its compiler, it acquired a kind of aura of sanctity. This is shown, for instance, by the fact that in the twelfth century a society of devout traditionists read it from end to end in 56 sittings before the tomb of the Blessed Prophet in Medina.⁷⁸

It appears, however, that on account of its large bulk and because of the collection of many better planned and more practical works on *ḥadīth* during the third and fourth centuries, the *Musnad* of Aḥmad grew less popular, and copies of it became more scarce; so that al-Muzanī, one of the leading traditionists of the fourth century, was surprised to learn from a

ḥadīth student that he had read 150 parts of the book with Abū Bakr ibn Mālik. Muzanī recalled that when he himself had been a student in Iraq that people were surprised to find even one part of the *Musnad* with any traditionist.⁷⁹ The scarcity of its manuscripts in modern libraries, therefore, is not a matter for surprise.

4.2C OTHER MUSNAD WORKS

Like al-Ṭayālīsī and Ibn Ḥanbal, many other traditionists compiled *musnad* works on the same lines, with certain differences in the details of internal structure. These include Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd ibn Ḥumayd (d.249/863), Abū ʿAwāna (d.317/929),⁸⁰ Ibn Abī Shayba (d.235/849),⁸¹ Ishāq ibn Rāhawayh (d.238/852),⁸² al-Ḥumaydī (d.219/834),⁸³ Abū Yaʿlā (d.307/919),⁸⁴ and others.⁸⁵

4.3 THE MUṢANNAF WORKS

Still more important than the *Musnad* works are the collections known as *muṣannaf*.⁸⁶ To this genre belong the most important of all *ḥadīth* collections, such as the *Ṣaḥīḥs* of Bukhārī and Muslim, the *Jāmiʿ* of al-Tirmidhī, and also the *Sunan* works such as those of al-Nasāʾī and Abū Daūd. The early *muṣannaf* works are mostly lost: the *Muṣannaf* of Wakīʿ, for instance, is known to us only through references in later works.⁸⁷

4.3a THE MUṢANNAF OF ʿABD AL-RAZZĀQ

The earliest *Muṣannaf* work in existence is the *Muṣannaf* of Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Razzāq ibn Humām (126/743–211–826), of Ṣanʿāʾ in the Yemen, which has been skilfully edited and published by the Indian scholar Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī.⁸⁸

We are told that ʿAbd al-Razzāq began the study of *ḥadīth* at the age of twenty. He kept the company of Maʿmar for seven years, learning *ḥadīth* from him, and studied under other leading authorities such as Ibn Jurayj, until he himself became one of the most outstanding *ḥadīth* experts in his day. Many later authorities acknowledge their debt to him, including traditionists like Yahyā ibn Maʿīn and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. It is said that after the death of the Prophet, people never travelled in such a large number to meet anyone as they did to ʿAbd al-Razzāq.⁸⁹ Later authorities, however, differ over the quality of the material he preserved: some regard it as reliable, while others are less enthusiastic.

Two works by him are mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm.⁹⁰ One of them, the *Kitāb al-Sunan*, is identical with the text now known as the *Muṣannaf*.⁹¹ It is divided in accordance with the *fiqh* classification into various books, in each of which the *ḥadīth*s are disposed according to subject. The final chapter is on *shamā'il*, the very last *ḥadīth* being about the Prophet's hair.⁹²

4.3b THE MUṢANNAF OF IBN ABĪ SHAYBA

More exhaustive still, however, is the *Muṣannaf* of Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Abī Shayba (d.235/849). His grandfather worked as judge of Wāsiṭ during the reign of al-Manṣūr, and his family produced many traditionists.⁹³ Based at Kūfa, he himself related traditions to leading figures such as Abū Zar'a, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. His *Muṣannaf*, which is considered an early source of the first importance, has recently been printed in thirteen volumes.⁹⁴

4.3c THE ṢAḤĪḤ OF AL-BUKHĀRĪ

The most important of all *Muṣannaf* works, indeed, of all the *ḥadīth* collections, is of course *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī.⁹⁵ The compiler is said to have questioned more than a thousand masters of *ḥadīth*, who lived in places as far apart as Balkh, Merv, Nīsābūr, the Ḥijāz, Egypt and Iraq. Bukhārī used to seek aid in prayer before recording any tradition, and weighed every word he wrote with scrupulous exactitude. He devoted more than a quarter of his life to the creation of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, which is generally considered by the Muslims as an authority second only to the Qur'ān.

Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, who was born at Bukhārā in the year 194/810,⁹⁶ was of Persian origin. His ancestor, Bardizbah, was a farmer in the vicinity of Bukhārā, who was taken captive during the Muslim conquest of the region. Bardizbah's son, who took the name al-Mughīra, accepted Islam at the hand of al-Yamān al-Ju'fi, the Muslim governor of Bukhārā, and gained from him the *nisba* al-Ju'fi. Al-Mughīra's son Ibrāhīm, the grandfather of our author, had a son called Ismā'il, who became a traditionist of great piety and sound reputation. Scrupulous in his habits, he is said to have mentioned on his deathbed that in all he possessed there was not a penny which had not been earned by his own honest labour.⁹⁷

Ismā'il died leaving a considerable fortune to his widow and two sons, Aḥmad and Muḥammad, the latter being only an infant at the time. The child who was destined to play such a central role in the development of

ḥad. 'h literature was endowed by nature with great intellectual powers, altho igh he was physically frail. He possessed a sharp and photographic memory, and a great tenacity of purpose, which served him well in his academic life.

Like many scholars of his time, al-Bukhārī began his educational career under the guidance of his mother in his native city. Finishing his elementary studies at the young age of eleven, he immersed himself in the study of *ḥadīth*. Within six years he had mastered the knowledge of all the traditionists of Bukhārā, as well as everything contained in the books which were available to him. He thus travelled to Mecca with his mother and brother in order to perform the Pilgrimage. From the Holy City, he started a series of journeys in quest of *ḥadīth*, passing through all the important centres of Islamic learning, staying in each place as long as he needed, meeting the traditionists, learning all the *ḥadīth* they knew, and communicating his own knowledge to them.⁹⁸ It is recorded that he stayed at Basra for four or five years, and in the Ḥijāz for six; while he travelled to Egypt twice and to Kūfa and Baghdad many times.⁹⁹

Imām Bukhārī's *Wanderjahre* continued for some four decades. In the year 250/864, he came to the great Central Asian city of Nisābūr, where he was given a grand reception suitable to a traditionist of his rank. Here he devoted himself to the teaching of tradition, and wished to settle down. But he was obliged to leave the town when he declined to accept a request to deliver lectures on *ḥadīth* at the palace of Khālīd ibn Aḥmad al-Dhuhālī. From Nisābūr he travelled on to Khartank, a village near Bukhārā, at the request of its inhabitants. Here he settled down, and died in the year 256/870.

Throughout his life, al-Bukhārī displayed the character of a devout and saintly Muslim scholar. He was rigorous in the observance of his religious duties, ensuring that rather than relying on charity he always lived by means of trade, in which he was scrupulously honest. Once he lost ten thousand dirhams on account of a minute scruple. A good deal of his income, in fact, was spent on helping the students and the poor. It is said that he never showed an ill-temper to anyone, even when there was more than sufficient cause; nor did he bear ill-will against anybody. Even towards those who had caused his exile from Nisābūr, he harboured no grudge.¹⁰⁰

Ḥadīth was almost an obsession with Bukhārī. He spared no pains for it, sacrificing almost everything for its sake. On one of his voyages he was so short of money that he lived on wild herbs for three days. But he enjoyed one form of public recreation: archery, in which he had acquired great skill. His amanuensis, who lived with him for a considerable time, writes that Bukhārī

often went out to practice his aim, and only twice during his sojourn with him did he see him miss the mark.¹⁰¹

Since the very outset of his career, al-Bukhārī showed the signs of greatness. It is said that at the age of eleven he pointed out a mistake of one of his teachers. The teacher laughed at the audacity of the young student; but al-Bukhārī persisted in his correction, and challenged his teacher to refer to his book, which justified the pupil's contention.¹⁰² When still a boy, too, he was entreated by a large group of *ḥadīth* students to give a lecture on the subject. He accepted their request, and a large crowd of students duly gathered at a mosque, and accepted the traditions which he related.¹⁰³ Once, when he visited Baṣra, the authorities were notified of his arrival, and a day was fixed for him to lecture. At the lecture, he was able to confine himself only to such traditions as he had received on the authority of the early traditionists of Baṣra, and had none the less been unknown to the audience.¹⁰⁴

On many occasions al-Bukhārī's learning was put to severe tests, of a kind often favoured by rigorous scholars of the time,¹⁰⁵ and he seems always to have emerged with credit. At Baghdad, ten traditionists changed the *isnāds* and contents of a hundred traditions, recited them to al-Bukhārī at a public meeting, and asked him questions about them. Al-Bukhārī confessed his ignorance of the traditions which they had recited. But then he recited the correct versions of all the traditions concerned, and said that probably his questioners had inadvertently recited them wrongly. At Samarqand, four hundred students tested al-Bukhārī's knowledge in the same way, and al-Bukhārī succeeded in exposing their interpolations. At Nisābūr, Muslim, the author of another *Ṣaḥīḥ*, together with others, asked al-Bukhārī questions about certain traditions, and found his answers completely satisfactory. In many scholarly gatherings he successfully identified some of the obscurer early *ḥadīth* narrators in a way which had eluded the other scholars present. These repeated trials and triumphs of al-Bukhārī won him recognition as the greatest traditionist of his time by all the major authorities with whom he came in contact, including Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī, Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba, Ishāq ibn Rāhawayh, and others.¹⁰⁶

Al-Bukhārī's writings began during his stay in Medina at the age of 18, when he compiled his two earliest books. One of these contained the decrees and judgements of the Companions and the Followers, while the other was made up of short biographies of the important narrators of tradition during his own lifetime.¹⁰⁷ A large number of other collections followed; a list is furnished by his biographers.¹⁰⁸

The *Ṣaḥīḥ*, known commonly as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, is the most important

of his books. It is said to have been heard by 90,000 of the author's students, and is considered by almost all traditionists to be the most reliable collection of *ḥadīth*. So venerated is the book that some Muslims use it as a charm through which God overcomes their difficulties;¹⁰⁹ and merely to possess a copy of it has been regarded as a proof against misfortune.¹¹⁰

The *Ṣaḥīḥ* may be seen as Bukhārī's life-work: his earlier treatises served him as a preparation for this *magnum opus*, while his later books were little more than offshoots of it. It was to the *Ṣaḥīḥ* that he devoted his most intense care and attention, expending about a quarter of his life on it.¹¹¹

Bukhārī's notion to compile the *Ṣaḥīḥ* owed its origin to a casual remark from Ishāq ibn Rāhawayh (166–238/782–852), who said that he wished that a traditionist would compile a short but comprehensive book containing the genuine traditions only. These words seem to have fired al-Bukhārī's imagination, and he set to work with indefatigable energy and care. He sifted through all the traditions known to him, tested their genuineness according to canons of criticism he himself developed, selected 7,275 out of some 600,000 *ḥadīths*,¹¹² and arranged them according to their subject matter under separate headings, most of which are taken from the Qur'ān, and in some cases from the traditions themselves.

Because al-Bukhārī nowhere mentions what canons of criticism he applied to the traditions to test their genuineness, or tells us why he compiled the book, many later scholars have tried to infer these things from the text itself. Al-Ḥāzimī, in his *Shurūṭ al-A'imma*, al-ʿIrāqī in his *Alfiyya*, al-ʿAynī and al-Qaṣṭallānī in their introductions to their commentaries on the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and many other writers on the *ḥadīth* sciences, including Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, have tried to deduce Bukhārī's principles from the material he presents.

As we have seen, al-Bukhārī's main object was to collect together the sound traditions only.¹¹³ By these, he meant such traditions as were handed down to him from the Prophet on the authority of a well-known Companion, via a continuous chain of narrators who, according to his records, research and knowledge, had been unanimously accepted by honest and trustworthy traditionists as men and women of integrity, possessed of a retentive memory and firm faith, accepted on condition that their narrations were not contrary to what was related by the other reliable authorities, and were free from defects. Al-Bukhārī includes in his work the narrations of these narrators when they explicitly state that they had received the traditions from their own authorities. If their statement in this regard was ambiguous, he took care that they had demonstrably met their teachers, and were not given to careless statements.¹¹⁴

From the above principles, which Imām Bukhārī took as his guide in

choosing his materials, his caution is evident. It is important to note, however, that he used less exacting criteria for the traditions which he used as headings for some of his chapters, and as corroboratives for the principal ones. In such cases, he often omits all or part of the *isnād*, and in certain cases relies on weak authorities.¹¹⁵ The number of 'suspended' (*mu'allaq*) and corroborative traditions in the book amounts to about 1,725.¹¹⁶

From this it is clear that Bukhārī's purpose was not only to collect what he considered to be sound traditions, but also to impress their contents on the minds of his readers, and to show them what doctrinal and legal inferences could be drawn from them. He therefore divided the whole work into more than a hundred books, which he subdivided in 3,450 chapters. Every chapter has a heading which serves as a key to the contents of the various traditions which it includes.

It has been aptly remarked that the headings of the various chapters of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* constitute the *fiqh* of Imām al-Bukhārī. These headings consist of verses from the Qur'an or passages from *ḥadīths*. In some cases they are in full agreement with the *ḥadīths* listed underneath them, while in some others, they are of a wider or narrower significance than the traditions which follow; in which case they serve as an additional object of interpretation and explanation of the traditions. In some cases, they are in the interrogative form, which denotes that the Imām regarded the problem as still undecided. In other cases, he wanted to warn against something which might outwardly appear to be wrong and impermissible. But in every chapter heading, al-Bukhārī kept a certain object in view. There are even cases where the headings are not followed by any traditions at all; here al-Bukhārī is intending to show that no genuine tradition on the subject was known to him.¹¹⁷

Bukhārī is also being original when he repeats the various versions of a single *ḥadīth* in different chapters. By doing this rather than putting them together in one place, he wanted to bring to light further evidence of the authenticity of the *ḥadīths* in question, and at the same time to draw more than one practical conclusion from them. Similarly, in including one part of a tradition in one chapter and inserting another part in another chapter, and in introducing the 'suspended' traditions as *marfū'* and *mawqūf*, al-Bukhārī has certain specific academic purposes in view, which are explained by the commentators of his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.¹¹⁸

It was thus that the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the work of a great traditionist who combined a vast knowledge of traditions and allied subjects with scrupulous piety, strict exactitude, the painstaking accuracy of an expert editor, and the legal acumen of an astute jurist, rapidly attracted the attention of the whole

Muslim community, and became accepted as an authority next only to the Qur'ān. Many Muslim doctors wrote enormous commentaries on it, in which they thoroughly discuss every aspect of the book, and every word of its contents, from the legal, linguistic, contextual and historical aspects. Twelve such commentaries have been printed, while at least another fifty-nine remain in manuscript form.¹¹⁹

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the *Ṣaḥīḥ* is free of defects, or that the Muslim scholars have failed to criticise it in certain respects. Thus it is generally accepted that like other traditionists, al-Bukhārī confines his criticism to the narrators of traditions, and their reliability, and pays little attention to the probability or possibility of the truth of the actual material reported by them. In estimating the reliability of the narrators, his judgement has in certain cases been erroneous, and the Muslim traditionists have not failed to point this out. Al-Dāraqutnī (306/918–385/995) tried to show the weakness of some two hundred traditions contained in the book, in his work *al-Istidrāk wa'l-tatabbu'*,¹²⁰ which has been summarised by al-Jazā'irī in his *Tawjīḥ al-Nazar*.¹²¹ Abū Mas'ūd of Damascus, and Abū 'Alī al-Ghassānī have also criticised the *Ṣaḥīḥ*,¹²² while al-'Aynī in his celebrated commentary has shown the defects of some of its contents.¹²³

Despite this, all the Muslim traditionists, including those who have criticised the *Ṣaḥīḥ*, have paid unanimous tribute to the general accuracy, scrupulous care, and exactitude of the book's author. 'In his selections of *ḥadīth*', says the orientalist Brockelmann, 'he has shown the greatest critical ability, and in editing the text has sought to obtain the most scrupulous accuracy.'¹²⁴

4.3d THE ṢAḤĪḤ OF MUSLIM

The position of Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the literature is not, of course, unrivalled. Another *Ṣaḥīḥ* was being compiled almost simultaneously, which was considered its superior by some, its equal by others, and second to it by most. This was the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū'l-Ḥusayn 'Asākir al-Dīn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj ibn Muslim al-Qushayrī al-Nisābūrī, known as Imām Muslim.¹²⁵

As his *nisba* shows, Muslim belonged to the Qushayr tribe of the Arabs, an offshoot of the mighty clan of Rabī'a. His tribe had taken an important part in the history of Islam after the death of the Prophet. Ḥayda of Qushayr is mentioned in the *Iṣāba* as one of the Companions,¹²⁶ while Qurra ibn Ḥubayra, another Qushayrī, was appointed by the Prophet as *walī* in charge of the alms of his people.¹²⁷ Ziyād ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qushayrī is said

to have killed a vast number of Byzantine troopers at the Battle of the Yarmūk, in which he lost one of his legs.¹²⁸

After the great Islamic conquests, various families of Qushayrīs migrated from Arabia and settled in the new provinces, some in the west, and others in the east. Kulthūm ibn ʿIyāḍ and his nephew Balj ibn Bishr, who had served as governors of Ifrīqiya and Spain respectively, settled down in a district near Qurṭuba (Cordoba). Another Qushayrī family made their residence at nearby al-Bīra (Elvira). Others headed east, and settled in Khurasān. Among them was one Zurāra, who served as provincial governor for a time. His son ʿAmr, and grandson Ḥumayd ibn ʿAmr, settled down at Nīsābūr.¹²⁹ From them our author was probably descended: the son of al-Ḥajjāj, who was himself a traditionist of no mean repute.¹³⁰

Very little is known about Muslim's early life. It is said that he was born in 202/817, and that having learnt and excelled in the usual disciplines at a precocious age, focussed his attention on *ḥadīth*. In its pursuit he travelled widely, visiting all the important centres of learning in Persia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. He attended the lectures of most of the great traditionists of his day, including Ishāq ibn Rāhawayh, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, ʿUbayd Allāh al-Qawāriri, Shuwayḥ ibn Yūnus, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Maslama, and Ḥamala ibn Yaḥyā. He settled down at Nīsābūr, earning a living from a small business, and devoted the remainder of his time to the service of the Prophetic *sunna*. He died in the year 261/874.

His character is said to have been admirable. His fearless loyalty to the truth is shown by his persistence in associating with Bukhārī despite the political pressures brought to bear on the latter.¹³¹ Like Bukhārī, he adhered to the usual Islamic ethic of refusing to speak ill of anyone.¹³²

Like Bukhārī, too, he wrote a good number of books and treatises on *ḥadīth*, and on related subjects. Ibn al-Nadīm mentions five books by him on the subject.¹³³ Ḥājī Khālifa adds the names of many other works by him in the same field.¹³⁴ In his *Ṣaḥīḥ* he examined a third of a million *ḥadīths*,¹³⁵ from which he selected only about four thousand, which the traditionists unanimously regarded as sound.¹³⁶

Like Bukhārī, Muslim regarded a *ḥadīth* as *Ṣaḥīḥ* only when it had been handed down to him through a continuous *isnād* of known and reliable authorities, was compatible with other material established in this way, and was free from various types of deficiency.¹³⁷ He adopted a threefold classification of *ḥadīths*. Firstly, there were those which had been related by narrators who were straightforward and steadfast in their narrations, did not differ much in them from other reliable narrators, and did not commit any palpable confusion in their reports. Secondly, there were traditions whose

narrators were not distinguished for their retentive memory and steadfastness in narrations. Thirdly, there were the *ḥadīths* narrated on the authority of people whom all or most traditionists declared were of questionable reliability. According to Imām Muslim, the first group makes up the bulk of his book; the second is included as corroborative of the first, while the third is entirely rejected.¹³⁸

Because *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim's* Book of *Tafsīr* is neither complete nor systematic, the work is not considered a comprehensive collection (*Jāmi'*) like that of Imām Bukhārī. Despite this, Imām Muslim strictly observed many principles of the science of *ḥadīth* which had been to some extent neglected by al-Bukhārī. He draws a distinction between the terms *akhbārānā* and *haddathanā*, and always uses the former in connection with the traditions which had been recited to him by his own teachers, assigning the latter to what he had in turn read out to them.¹³⁹ He was more strict and consistent than al-Bukhārī in pointing out the differences between the narrations of the various *rāwīs*, and in stating their character and other particulars. He also showed greater acumen in the arrangement of traditions and their *isnāds* in his work, and in presenting the different versions of a single tradition in one place.¹⁴⁰ Unlike Imām Bukhārī, he appears not to have committed any mistake or confusion in the text or *isnād* of any tradition.¹⁴¹ He added a long introduction, in which he explained some of the principles which he had followed in the choice of materials for his book; and which should be followed in accepting and relating traditions.

Upon completing his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Imām Muslim presented it to Abū Zar'a of Rayy, a traditionist of great repute, for his comments. Abū Zar'a inspected it closely, and Muslim deleted everything which he thought was defective, and retained only such traditions as were declared by him to be genuine.¹⁴²

Thus carefully compiled by Muslim, and proof-read by Abū Zar'a, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* has been acclaimed as the most authentic collection of traditions after that of Bukhārī, and superior to the latter in the details of its arrangement. Some traditionists hold it to be superior to the work of Bukhārī in every respect.¹⁴³

After Muslim, a number of other scholars also compiled *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections. These include Ibn Khuzayma (d.311/923),¹⁴⁴ Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad ibn Ḥibbān (d.354/965),¹⁴⁵ and others. None of them, however, ever gained the recognition and popularity which the Muslim community has accorded the definitive achievements of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

4.4 THE SUNAN WORKS

The *Sunan* works constitute the richest branch of *ḥadīth* literature. Since the earliest period of Islam, the traditionists attached greater importance to legal and doctrinal reports than they did to accounts of a historical (*maghāzī*) nature, arguing that the precise date of the Prophet's departure from Badr, for instance, was of no practical utility for a Muslim. Attention, therefore, should rather be focussed on topics of relevance to his or her daily life, such as ablutions, prayers, sales, marriages, and so forth.

This emphasis on *ḥadīths* of a practical nature grew even more pronounced after the second half of the third century. Most of the traditionists, with the exception only of the most ambitious, compiled *ḥadīth* collections of the *sunan* alone. Such are the works of Abū Daūd al-Sijistānī, al-Tirmidhī,¹⁴⁶ al-Nasā'ī, al-Dārimī, Ibn Māja, al-Dāraquṭnī, and a considerable number of others.

4.4a THE SUNAN OF ABŪ DAŪD

This work, which is among the most important of the *ḥadīth* anthologies, is the work of Abū Daūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistānī, who is said to have examined 500,000 *ḥadīths*, and selected 4,800 for his book, a labour which occupied him for twenty years.¹⁴⁷

Abū Daūd was a descendant of one 'Imrān of the Azd tribe, who was killed during the Battle of Šiffin on the side of 'Alī.¹⁴⁸ Abū Daūd himself was born in 203/817. The biographers dispute the place of his birth: Ibn Khallikān,¹⁴⁹ and, following him, Wüstenfeld, hold that he was born in a village known as Sijistāna in the vicinity of Bašra, while Yāqūt,¹⁵⁰ al-Sam'ānī¹⁵¹ and al-Subkī¹⁵² think that he was born in the well-known region of Sijistān in Khurasān. There is, in fact, no evidence that a village called Sijistāna ever existed in the Bašra region.

When his elementary education, which probably took place in his native city, was complete, he joined a school in Nisābūr when he was ten. There he studied under Muḥammad ibn Aslam (d.242/856).¹⁵³ He then travelled to Bašra,¹⁵⁴ where he received the bulk of his *ḥadīth* training. In 224/838 he visited Kūfa, from which city he began a series of journeys in search of *ḥadīth*, which took him to the Hījāz, Iraq, Persia, Syria and Egypt. He met most of the foremost traditionists of his time, and acquired from them a profound knowledge of the traditions which were available.¹⁵⁵

Abū Daūd's travels regularly took him to the metropolis of Baghdad.

Once, while staying in that city, he was visited by Abū Aḥmad al-Muwaffaq, the celebrated commander and brother of the caliph al-Mu'tamid. When Abū Daūd enquired as to the purpose of his visit, al-Muwaffaq replied that his objective was threefold. Firstly, he wished to invite Abū Daūd to reside at Baṣra, which had become deserted on account of the Zanj insurrection, and would, he thought, be repopulated if famous scholars and their students moved there. Secondly, he requested Abū Daūd to give classes to al-Muwaffaq's family. Thirdly, he asked him to make these classes private, so that ordinary students would be excluded. Abū Daūd accepted the first two requests, but expressed his inability to comply with the third. For 'to knowledge all are equal', and Abū Daūd would not tolerate any distinction between rich and poor students. The result was that al-Muwaffaq's sons attended his lectures side by side with anyone else who wished to attend.¹⁵⁶

This anecdote, preserved for us by al-Subkī, throws light not just on the great reputation enjoyed by Abū Daūd as a scholar and a man of principle, but also on the date of his final settlement at Baṣra. This is unlikely to have occurred before the year 270/883, when the Zanj insurrection was finally crushed. Abū Daūd died at Baṣra in the year 275/888, at the age of 73.

His encyclopedic knowledge of traditions, his photographic memory, his upright character, and his kindliness, are generally recognised by all the traditionists.¹⁵⁷ One of his most celebrated books on traditions and Sacred Law is his *Sunan*, which is not only regarded as the first work of its type in the *ḥadīth* literature, but is generally seen as the best and most reliable. It is divided into books, which are subdivided into chapters.¹⁵⁸

Although Abū Daūd retained the scrupulous exactitude of his predecessors in reproducing the material which he collected, he differed from them in the criteria of selection. In his *Sunan*, he included not only the *ṣaḥīḥ* traditions (as Bukhārī and Muslim had done), but also some other accounts that had been classed by other scholars as weak or doubtful. Among the narrators, he relied not only on those who had been unanimously declared acceptable, but also on others who were the subject of criticism from some quarters. This is not necessarily a defect in his book: some critics such as Shu'ba had in fact been overstrict in their criticisms of the narrators.¹⁵⁹ None the less, Abū Daūd collected the most reliable traditions known to him on every subject of the *fiqh*, quoting the sources through which the traditions had reached him, together with the various versions of the accounts in question. He draws attention to the defects of certain of the traditions he cites, as well as the relative value of the variant texts. In the case of the traditions which he believed to be genuine, however, he makes no comments whatsoever; he also has a habit of taking

only those parts of long *ḥadīths* which are relevant to the chapter in which they are included.¹⁶⁰

The following remarks made by Abū Daūd in connection with some of his traditions give us a general idea of the method and nature of his criticism:

Abū Daūd says: This is an inauthentic (*munkar*) *ḥadīth*. Certainly, it is related by Ibn Jurayj from Ziyād ibn Sa'd, from al-Zuhri, from Anas, that he said that the Prophet (upon whom be God's blessings and peace), had put on a ring made of palm-leaf, which he in time discarded. The mistake in this *ḥadīth* is to be attributed to Humām. No other narrator has related it.¹⁶¹

About another *ḥadīth* he has this to say:

This is narrated by Ibn Wahb only. A similar *ḥadīth* has however been related by Ma'qil ibn 'Ubayd Allāh through a chain of narrators.¹⁶²

And in connection with a further *ḥadīth*, after giving two versions of it, he remarks: The account related by Anas is more correct than the other.¹⁶³

At another place, he points out that only the traditionists of Egypt have given an *isnād* for it.¹⁶⁴ To yet another, he adds a note about one of its narrators, Abū Ishāq, stating that he had learnt only four traditions from al-Ḥārith, and that the present *ḥadīth*, although allegedly told on al-Ḥārith's authority, was not one of them.¹⁶⁵ About the narrators of still another *ḥadīth*, he says: 'Abū Khalīl never heard any *ḥadīths* from Qatāda,'¹⁶⁶ while elsewhere he remarks: 'This *ḥadīth* has been handed down by several chains of authorities, all of which are inauthentic.'¹⁶⁷

Containing all the legal traditions which may serve as foundations for Islamic rituals and law, and furnishing explicit notes on the authority and value of these traditions, Abū Daūd's book has generally been accepted as the most important work of the *sunan* genre. 'The *Kitāb al-Sunan* of Abū Daūd,' exclaims its commentator al-Khaṭṭābī, 'is a noble book, the like of which has never been written.' Since the author collected traditions which no-one else had ever assembled together, it has been accepted as a standard work by scholars of a wide variety of schools, particularly in Iraq, Egypt, North Africa and many other parts of the Islamic world.¹⁶⁸

4.4b THE JĀMI' OF AL-TIRMIDHĪ

The general principles with regard to the criticism of *ḥadīth* which had been adopted by Abū Daūd were further improved upon and followed by his student Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, in his *Jāmi'*. This work contains the bulk of the traditions—legal, dogmatic, and historical—which had been accepted by the jurists of the main juridical tendencies as the basis of Islamic law.¹⁶⁹

Al-Tirmidhī was born at Mecca in the year 206/821. He travelled a good deal in search of traditions, visiting the great centres of Islamic learning in Iraq, Persia and Khurasān, where he was able to associate with eminent traditionists such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Daūd and others. He died at Tirmidh in 279/892.¹⁷⁰

Like Abū Daūd, Abū 'Īsā possessed a remarkably sharp and retentive memory, which was severely tested many times. It is related that during an early stage of his travels, a traditionist once dictated to him several traditions which occupied sixteen pages, which, however, were lost by Tirmidhī before he could revise them. He met the traditionist again after some time, and requested him to recite some traditions. The teacher suggested that he would read out from his manuscript the same traditions that he had dictated to Tirmidhī during their previous meeting, and that Tirmidhī should compare his notes with what he heard. Instead of telling the traditionist that he had misplaced his notes, Tirmidhī picked up some blank sheets of paper in his hand, and looked into them as though they contained his notes, while the teacher began to read his book. The latter soon noticed the ruse, and grew angry at the young student's conduct. Tirmidhī, however, explained that he remembered every word of what had been dictated to him. The teacher was reluctant to believe him, and challenged him to recite the traditions from his memory. Tirmidhī accepted this challenge, and proceeded to recite all the traditions without committing a single mistake. At this, the teacher doubted his statement that he had not been able to revise from his notes, and decided to test his student by reciting forty other traditions, and ask Tirmidhī to reproduce them. Without hesitation, Tirmidhī repeated what he heard verbatim, and his teacher, convinced now of the truth of his statement, declared his pleasure and satisfaction at the young man's powers of memory.

Tirmidhī's *Jāmi'*, assembled through the use of this gift, is recognised as one of the most important works of *ḥadīth* literature, and is unanimously included among the six canonical collections of *ḥadīth*. For the first time, the author used the principle of only considering those traditions on which the

various rituals and laws of Islam had been established by the ulama of the various schools. Not only did he take great pains to determine the identity, the names, the titles and the *kunya* of the narrators of the traditions he cited; he also attempted to state the degree of their reliability, explaining what use had been made of them by the jurists of the Schools.¹⁷¹ He adds a note to almost every *ḥadīth*, prefaced with the words, 'Abū 'Īsā says . . .'. He then proceeds to state a range of points connected with the tradition. The following examples will show the nature and importance of these notes.

(i) 'It was related to us by Abū Kurayb, who related it from 'Abda bint Sulaymān from Muḥammad ibn 'Amr, from Abū Salmā from Abū Hurayra, who said that the Prophet (may God's peace and blessings rest upon him) said that had he not feared causing hardship to his people, he would have enjoined them to brush their teeth with the *miswāk*-brush before every prayer. Abū 'Īsā says: "This *ḥadīth* has been related by Muḥammad ibn Ishāq from Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, from Abū Salmā, from Zayd ibn Khālid, from the Prophet (upon whom be peace). And in my view both the traditions of Abū Salmā from Abū Hurayra and Zayd ibn Khālid from the Prophet are genuine, because it has been related to me from Abū Hurayra from the Prophet, through more than one chain of authorities. Muḥammad, however, thinks that the tradition of Abū Salma from Zayd ibn Khālid is the most correct. On the subject there are [traditions] related by Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddiq, 'Alī, 'Ā'isha, Khālid, Anas, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr, Umm Ḥabība and Ibn 'Umar."¹⁷²

(ii) 'Qutayba, Hannād, Abū Kurayb, Aḥmad ibn Manī', Maḥmūd ibn Ghaylān and Abū 'Ammār have related to us saying that Wakī related to them from al-A'mash, from Ḥabīb ibn Abī Thābit, from 'Urwa, from 'Ā'isha, that the Prophet (may the blessings and peace of God be upon him) once kissed one of his wives, and then went out to offer prayers without performing ablution. 'Urwa asked 'Ā'isha: "Who could this be but yourself?" and 'Ā'isha laughed. Abū 'Īsā says: "A similar tradition has been related by many of those who possessed knowledge among the Companions and the Followers, and this is the opinion of Sufyān al-Thawrī and the jurists of Kūfa, who hold that a kiss does not invalidate one's ablution. Mālik ibn Anas, al-Awzā'ī, al-Shāfi'ī, Aḥmad [ibn Hanbal] and Ishāq [ibn Rāhawayh], however, hold that a kiss does indeed invalidate the ablution, and this is the opinion of many learned Companions and Followers. Our people [Mālik, Aḥmad *et al.*] did not follow the *ḥadīth* related by 'Ā'isha from the Prophet (upon whom be peace) because it did not appear to be genuine to them on

account of its *isnād*. I heard Abū Bakr al-ʿAṭṭār of Baṣra quote ʿAlī ibn al-Madīnī, who said that Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd al-Qaṭṭān declared this tradition to be weak, and said that it was without value. I also heard Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl call it a weak tradition, saying that Ḥabīb ibn Abī Thābit never received any traditions from ʿUrwa. Ibrāhīm al-Taymī also related from ʿĀʾisha that the Prophet (upon whom be blessings and peace) kissed her and did not perform ablutions afterwards; but this too is not genuine, because Ibrāhīm al-Taymī is not known to have received this tradition from ʿĀʾisha. As a matter of fact, nothing that has been imputed to the Prophet on this subject can be called 'genuine'".¹⁷³

(iii) ʿAḥmad ibn Muḥammad related to us [saying that] ʿAbd Allāh related to us from Fuḍayl ibn Ghazwān from Ibn Abī Nuʿaym from Abū Hurayra, who said that Abu'l-Qāsim [sc. the Prophet], the Prophet of Forgiveness (upon whom be God's blessings and peace), said that he who accused his slave falsely, while his slave was innocent of that which he imputed to him, would be punished on Judgement Day. This is a fair, genuine tradition (*ḥadīth ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*). On the subject, other traditions are related by Suwayd ibn Muqarrin and ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar. As for Ibn Abī Nuʿaym, he is ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Nuʿaym, whose *kunya* is Abu'l-Hakam."¹⁷⁴

The above three examples should suffice to demonstrate the nature of the remarks appended by Tirmidhī to the traditions of his *Jāmiʿ*. These *ḥadīths* he categorised as either *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Sound), *Ḥasan* (Fair), *Ṣaḥīḥ Ḥasan* (Sound-Fair), *Ḥasan Ṣaḥīḥ* (Fair-Sound), *Gharīb* (Rare), *Ḍaʿīf* (Weak), or *Munkar* (Undetermined).¹⁷⁵ But perhaps the most important feature of the *Jāmiʿ*, so far as assessments of reliability are concerned, is the category of *ḥasan*.

To this class belong most of the traditions on which many of the rites and laws of religion are based. The term had already been used by Bukhārī, Ibn Ḥanbal and others,¹⁷⁶ but rather sparingly, and probably in a loose and non-technical sense. Tirmidhī realised the importance of these *ḥadīths* as a source of law, defined the term for the first time (in the 'Kitāb al-ʿIlal' of his *Jāmiʿ*), and applied it to those traditions which fulfilled its requirements.

Tirmidhī defines a *ḥasan* Tradition as one that has been related by narrators who are not accused of falsehood, provided it is handed down by more than one chain of authorities, and is not contrary to what has been related by other reliable narrators. Such traditions cannot be termed *ṣaḥīḥ*, because their soundness is not proven according to the traditional canons. It would be equally wrong to declare them to be entirely unreliable, however, since neither the character of their narrators warrants such a suspicion, nor

can it be justified by a comparison with traditions handed down by reliable authorities. Their reliability or otherwise depends on the nature of the particular traditions and the character of their narrators, and must therefore be different in different cases. Some of these traditions may be nearly, although not exactly, as reliable as the Sound traditions, while others may be almost, though not quite, as unreliable as material related by unknown narrators.

To determine this class of traditions and the degree of their reliability, Tirmidhī described some of them as *ṣaḥīḥ ḥasan*, some as *ḥasan*, and others as *ḥasan gharīb*. But he was not quite as consistent in his use of the term *ḥasan*, and many traditionists have criticised him on this account, explaining his inconsistency in various ways.¹⁷⁷

Despite this, however, the *Jāmi'* has sufficient virtues to ensure it a place as a unique work in the literature.

4.4C THE SUNAN OF AL-NASĀ'Ī

Another important work in this category is that compiled by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad ibn Shu'ayb al-Nasā'ī, who was born in the year 214 or 215 AH (6 or 7 years after Tirmidhī), at Nasā', a town in Khurasān. Having received his early education in his home province, he travelled at the age of fifteen to Balkh, where he studied *ḥadīths* with Qutayba ibn Sa'īd for over a year.¹⁷⁸ He travelled widely in pursuit of *ḥadīth*, and settled down in Egypt, when one of his teachers, Yūnus ibn 'Abd al-'Alā', was still living. In 302/914 he went to Damascus, where he found the people holding erroneous views against 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, due to the past influence of the Umayyads. In order to guide the people, he composed a book on the merits of 'Alī, and wanted to read it from the pulpit of a mosque. But the congregation, instead of giving him a patient hearing, maltreated him, kicked him, and drove him from the mosque. He died in the year 303/915, perhaps as a result of this incident.¹⁷⁹

Nasā'ī was recognised as the leading traditionist of his day. 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, 'Alī ibn 'Umar and other major traditionists, regarded him thus.¹⁸⁰ His scrupulousness is evident from the fact that in connection with the traditions related by al-Ḥārith, he never used the term *ḥaddathanā* or *akhbaranā*, as he did in the case of those traditions which had reached him via other scholars, for although the materials he acquired from al-Ḥārith were read by the latter in a public class, Nasā'ī had been prohibited from attending, and thus was obliged to hear them by concealing himself at the gate of the lecture hall.

In his large work on *sunan* (which he confessed contained a fair number of weak and dubious traditions), al-Nasā'ī compiled the legal traditions which he considered to be either fairly reliable or of possible reliability.¹⁸¹ At the request of some of his friends, he also produced a synopsis of the *Sunan*, called *al-Mujtabā*, or *al-Sunan al-Ṣuḡhrā*. This latter work, which he claimed contained only reliable traditions, is now accepted as one of the six canonical collections.¹⁸²

In *al-Sunan al-Ṣuḡhrā*, Nasā'ī entirely ignores the point of view of his contemporary Tirmidhī, who had sought to apply traditions to specific problems, and arranged his book accordingly. Nasā'ī's main object was only to establish the text of traditions and record the divergences between their various versions, almost all of which he quotes *in extenso*, instead of merely referring to them, as Abū Daūd and Tirmidhī had done. In many places, he gives headings to the differences between the various narrators, and mentions the smallest differences between them. This 'pedantry', as Goldziher describes it,¹⁸³ is in fact of integral importance to the *muḥaddith's* art, and is not (as Goldziher thinks) confined to the chapters on rituals alone, but is abundantly present in other chapters. In some cases, after giving the various versions of a *ḥadīth*, Nasā'ī points out that some of them are incorrect. He is known, likewise, for his strictness in assessing and selecting his authorities; in fact, it is said that his canons of criticism were more rigorous than those of Muslim.¹⁸⁴ The book does, however, contain many weak and doubtful traditions related by unknown narrators of questionable credentials.¹⁸⁵

4.4d THE SUNAN OF AL-DĀRIMĪ

This is among the earliest *sunan* works to have come down to us.¹⁸⁶ Its author, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān (181–255/797–868)¹⁸⁷ was a member of the Arabian clan of the Banū Dārim, an offshoot of the tribe of Tamīm,¹⁸⁸ to which he was probably attached as a *mawlā*. Like many of his contemporaries, he travelled a good deal in search of *ḥadīths*, and studied under important traditionists such as Yazīd ibn Hārūn and Sa'īd ibn 'Āmir. Well-known for his devotion to his field, he was also celebrated for his honesty and piety. When offered a post as judge at Samarqand he refused, afraid he might commit an injustice, until he was pressed hard to accept; and he resigned after judging only one case.¹⁸⁹

The *Sunan* of al-Dārimī has been described as a *musnad* work.¹⁹⁰ This, however, is incorrect, at least if the term be employed in its general sense. Some traditionists have classed it as a *ṣaḥīḥ*; but this, too, is inaccurate, for

the book contains many traditions which fail to satisfy the conditions stipulated for sound *ḥadīths*.

The work contains some 3,550 traditions, arranged in 1,408 chapters according to subject.¹⁹¹ One special feature of the book is its general introductory chapter in which the compiler presents a number of *ḥadīths* connected with a range of matters, including certain usages of the Arabs before Islam, traditions connected with the life and character of the Prophet, material related to the written recording of *ḥadīths*, and the high importance of knowledge. In the main body of the text, Dārimī follows the same plan as the later *sunan* compilers. After citing a group of traditions, he adds notes, in some of which he offers his own opinion on certain problems, identifies some narrators, or criticises their reliability, or draws attention to variant versions of a tradition. These notes, however, are much briefer than those appended to the previously mentioned three *sunan* works.

The book is generally accepted as an important source,¹⁹² and has been regarded by some traditionists as the sixth of the canonical collections.¹⁹³ It never, however, attained the position of the any of the former three works, because it contains more weak and defective traditions than they do.¹⁹⁴

4.4c THE SUNAN OF IBN MĀJA

Most *ḥadīth* scholars prefer the *Sunan* of Ibn Māja (209/824–273/886) to the work of Dārimī, including it in the 'Sound Six' collections. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Yazīd (normally known as Ibn Māja, denoting the title of his father, or perhaps his grandfather), was born at Qazwīn. Visiting the important centres of learning in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt, he studied under the great traditionists of his day, and compiled several works in the area of *ḥadīth*, the most important being his *Sunan*. In this work, the author collects four thousand traditions, distributed over 32 books and 1,500 chapters.¹⁹⁵ It is said that after completing the book, Ibn Māja presented it for criticism to Abū Zar'a, recognised as the most competent *ḥadīth* critic of the day. Abū Zar'a liked the general plan of the book, and remarked that he expected it to supersede the *ḥadīth* works which then enjoyed general currency. He also said that the number of weak traditions in the book was not large.¹⁹⁶

Despite this approbation, however, it emerges that the book does in fact include a good many forged traditions. Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥaqq of Delhi says that the traditions it contains about Qazwīn—the city in Iran to which Ibn Māja was connected—are forged.¹⁹⁷

4.4f THE SUNAN OF AL-DĀRAQUṬNĪ

Another *Sunan* work of importance was compiled by Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn 'Umar (306/918–385/995), generally known as al-Dāraquṭnī on account of his residence in the Baghdad urban quarter known as Dār Quṭn.

Al-Dāraquṭnī rapidly acquired Arabic literature and the Islamic sciences, in particular the Traditions¹⁹⁸ and the Variant Readings (*qirā'āt*) of the Qur'ān. His book on the latter subject is acknowledged as the first work of its type, and its general plan is followed by most later authors. Among his students, who recognised his wide and critical knowledge of *ḥadīth*, were al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī,¹⁹⁹ Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, whose book the *Hilya* is said to be the best work of Muslim hagiography,²⁰⁰ Tammām of Rayy, and the traditionist 'Abd al-Ghanī ibn Sa'īd. Al-Ḥākim, in particular, who narrates traditions from about 2,000 individuals,²⁰¹ remarked that he never met a scholar like Dāraquṭnī, whose knowledge proved encyclopedic whatever subject was broached.²⁰²

Almost every traditionist who came to Baghdad made a point of visiting him. Abū Maṣṣūr ibn al-Karkhī, while compiling his own *Musnad*, depended on Dāraquṭnī's help in identifying defective traditions; while Abū Bakr al-Barqānī based a work on *ḥadīth* on notes dictated by Dāraquṭnī to Abū Maṣṣūr.²⁰³ He likewise rendered material help in the compilation of a *musnad* work by Ibn Hinzāba, the able and learned minister of the Ikhshīdī rulers of Egypt. Having learnt that this *Musnad* was being compiled, Dāraquṭnī travelled from Baghdad to Egypt, where he remained until the work was completed. Throughout this period, Ibn Hinzāba showed him immense deference and respect, and upon completion bestowed upon him rich rewards.²⁰⁴

Dāraquṭnī himself compiled many useful works on *ḥadīth* and related subjects.²⁰⁵ For our purposes, the most useful of these is the *Sunan*, which was recognised as one of the most reliable *ḥadīth* collections—next in importance only to the Sound Six.²⁰⁶ It was used by al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) as one of the chief sources for his influential *Maṣābiḥ al-Sunna*, which in turn formed the basis for the *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ* of al-Tabrizī.²⁰⁷

In his *Sunan*, Dāraquṭnī adduces traditions he considers reasonably authentic, supplementing them with *isnāds* and alternate versions. Of the very first *ḥadīth*, for instance, he gives five different versions, with five separate chains of authority, some of which he adjudges weak.²⁰⁸ To some traditions he adds notes, in which he attempts to fix their degree of reliability and the identity of some of their narrators, and assesses their character and

reliability. The number of weak traditions in his *Sunan* is fairly large; it is at any rate larger than in any of the *Sunan* works conventionally included in the canonical Six; and has hence not been included among them.

4.4g THE SUNAN OF AL-BAYHAQĪ

After Dāraqutnī came Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn of Bayhaq, a group of villages near Nisābūr. Bayhaqī was born in 384/458, and studied tradition under more than a hundred eminent traditionists of his time, including the above-named al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, of whom he became the most eminent pupil. Having excelled in the various Islamic sciences, Bayhaqī soon became a remarkably prolific author, producing several hundred books on *ḥadīth* and Shāfiʿī law, some of which are said to be unparalleled in the history of the literature.²⁰⁹ His two *Sunan* works, of an unusual length and thoroughness, are particularly revered.²¹⁰ His reputation as a traditionist and a jurist attracted the attention of the learned of Nisābūr, who invited him to their city and requested him to read one of his books to them. He died in the year 458/1065.²¹¹

4.4h THE SUNAN OF SAʿĪD IBN MANṢŪR

Less well-known, but earlier than all the *sunan* works so far mentioned, is the *Sunan* of Abū ʿUthmān Saʿīd ibn Manṣūr ibn Shuʿba (d.227/841).²¹² Born at Merv and brought up in the city of Balkh, he wandered throughout a large part of the known world, finally settling at Mecca.

Ibn Manṣūr learnt traditions from a range of prominent experts including Imām Mālik, Ḥammād, Abū ʿAwāna and others, and in turn instructed another group of luminaries such as Muslim, Abū Daūd, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, all of whom spoke of his scholarship in terms of the highest veneration.²¹³ His *Sunan*, in which he is said to have had great confidence, appears to have been compiled towards the end of his life.²¹⁴ It contains a large number of traditions received from the Prophet through only three intermediaries.²¹⁵

4.4i THE SUNAN OF ABŪ MUSLIM AL-KASHSHĪ

The *nisba* of Abū Muslim Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Kashshī, who died in 282/895, has been explained as a reference either to his forefathers, or to his place of residence (a village called Kashsh located in Khuzistān).²¹⁶ The

latter interpretation seems to be supported by the fact of his prominent participation in a number of battles fought in the area.

After studying traditions under Abū 'Āṣim al-Nabīl, Abū 'Awāna and others, he visited Baghdad, where he delivered lectures on *ḥadīth*. These soon attracted a remarkably large number of students, so many, in fact, that his voice was not audible to them all, and seven men had to be appointed to repeat his words to various parts of the audience.²¹⁷ Like the work of Ibn Maṣūūr, his work on *sunan* is said to have contained many reports transmitted through only three narrators.²¹⁸

4.5 THE MU'JAM WORKS

Although the *Mu'jam* works never acquired the esteem accorded the collections of *Sunan*, many were compiled and are still extensively used. The best known are the *Mu'jams* of Abū'l-Qāsim Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad ibn Ayyūb al-Ṭabarānī, who is generally known by his *nisba*.

Ṭabarānī was born in Tiberias, then a flourishing Muslim city, in 260/873. On his academic travels, he visited most of the important centres of learning in Syria, Egypt, the Hijāz, Iraq and Iran, acquiring traditions from about a thousand narrators. He finally settled at Iṣfahān in 290/902, where a pension was fixed for him.²¹⁹ There he lived a quiet and saintly life for 70 years, teaching *ḥadīth* and compiling a number of books on the subject, dying at last in 360/970 at the age of one hundred.

Of his works, a list of which is provided by al-Dhahabī,²²⁰ the most important are his three *Mu'jams*. The largest of these, commonly known as *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr* (*The Great Mu'jam*), is in fact a *Musnad* work.²²¹ It contains about 25,000 traditions which have been collected together under the names of the various Companions by whom they are narrated, the names being presented alphabetically.²²² The 'Medium' *Mu'jam* (*al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ*) is in six volumes, and contains the rare traditions narrated to the compiler by his teachers, whose names, together with their traditions, are set out, again alphabetically. The author took great pride in this work, which, although it contains a number of weak traditions, demonstrates his wide knowledge of the subject. Finally, there is Ṭabarānī's *Lesser Mu'jam* (*al-Mu'jam al-Ṣaghīr*), which, according to his own statement, was his first *Mu'jam*, and which contains only one tradition narrated by each of his teachers.²²³

Although these are the best-known works of the type, many other *mu'jam* works were compiled, some of which are listed by Ḥāṭi Khalīfa.²²⁴

4.6 THE TRADITIONAL RANKING OF ḤADĪTH COLLECTIONS

The works of *ḥadīth* literature have been grouped by the traditionists into four classes, according to their authority and importance.

I. To the first category belong the works which are considered the most reliable. These are (i) the *Muwattaʿa*ʾ of Mālik; (ii) *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, and (iii) *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*.²²⁵ The latter two of these works include almost all the traditions contained in the *Muwattaʿa*ʾ, and hence most major traditionists did not include it in the six canonical collections. These three books have been generally accepted as authentic since the lifetime of their authors: the *Muwattaʿa*ʾ was declared by Imām al-Shāfiʿī to be the most authentic book after the Qurʾān,²²⁶ while the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī was, as described earlier, received by 90,000 students from the author himself, and was accepted as reliable by important traditionists of the time, such as Abuʾl-Ḥasan ibn al-Qaṭṭān²²⁷ and others.²²⁸ The *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, too, did not take long to receive the general approbation of the traditionists.

II. To a second category belong the four *Sunan* works, which, together with the two *Ṣaḥīḥs*, are known as *al-Kutub al-Sitta* (the 'Six Books'). The tendency to associate some of the *Sunan* works with the two *Ṣaḥīḥs* appears, as Goldziher recognises,²²⁹ to have begun sometime in the middle of the fourth century, when Saʿīd ibn al-Sakan²³⁰ announced that the two *Ṣaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and the two *Sunans* of Abū Daūd and al-Nasāʾī, were the foundations of Islam. After a period of time the *Jāmiʿ* of al-Tirmidhī was added to the above four books, and the five together were given the title of *al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*.²³¹

It is not easy to determine when the *Jāmiʿ* of al-Tirmidhī received the general recognition of the traditionists. Ibn Ḥazm, whose list of reliable *ḥadīth* works is still extant,²³² directed some criticism against the book, because it contained traditions related by the questionable figures of al-Maṣlūb and al-Kalbī.²³³ But it is probable that the general recognition of al-Tirmidhī's *Jāmiʿ* preceded that of the work of Ibn Māja, which was added to the five books for the first time by Muḥammad ibn Tāhir, who died around the beginning of the sixth century (505/1113). None the less, it has been pointed out that throughout the sixth century pride of place was denied Ibn Māja by the traditionists. Razīn ibn Muʿāwiya (d.535/1140), in his compendium of the Six Books (*Tajrīd al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sitta*), Ibn al-Kharrāṭ (d.581/1185), and al-Ḥāzimī (d.584/1184) did not recognise the *Sunan* of

Ibn Māja as a canonical collection. It was just a century after the death of Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir that the book was again recognised as one of the six collections of *ḥadīth*: by ‘Abd al-Ghanī (d.600/1203), in his *al-Kamāl fī ma‘rifat al-rijāl*, by Ibn al-Najjār (d.643/1245) in his *Rijāl al-Kutub al-Sitta*, by Najīb al-Dīn ibn Ṣayqal (d.672/1273) in his collection of traditions, by Shams al-Dīn ibn al-Jazarī (d.711/1311) in his work on the subject, and by al-Mizzī (d.742/1341) in his *Tuḥfa*. It may, therefore, be assumed that it was from the seventh century that the Six Books became generally recognised as the most reliable collections of *ḥadīth*.²³⁴

Among these six books, however, although the position of al-Bukhārī and Muslim was always supreme, the place of the *Sunan* of Ibn Māja always remained doubtful. Abū ‘Umar ‘Uthmān ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d.643/1245), and after him al-Nawawī (d.676/1277 and Ibn Khaldūn (d.808/1405) recognised only five books, and excluded Ibn Māja from this elite category.²³⁵ The other works included in the Six have been accepted by all the leading scholars of the Muslim East and West, as the most authentic works, and were included in the various selections of the best ten collections of *ḥadīth*.

The following principles appear to have guided the traditionists in their choice of these six works:

- (i) Their compilers had laid down certain clear principles for the selection and assessment of the *ḥadīth* they chose.
- (ii) They mostly contained sound or fair traditions, and any weak material was usually indicated as such.
- (iii) The material they contained had been carefully assessed and checked by the leading authorities in different parts of the Islamic world, and furnished with extensive commentaries which clarified their virtues and demerits.
- (iv) They had been used as a basis for the establishment of legal and theological positions.

III. To a third category belong such *Musnads*, *Muṣannafs*, and other collections as had been compiled before or after the *Ṣaḥīḥs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, contained reliable as well as unreliable material, and had not been thoroughly examined by the traditionists or used as source texts in books of law and doctrine. Works of this type include the *Musnads* of ‘Abd ibn Ḥumayd and al-Ṭayālīsī, and the *Muṣannaf* works of ‘Abd al-Razzāq, Ibn Abī Shayba, and others.

IV. A fourth category contains collections of *ḥadīths* made by compilers who in the later period collected traditions which were not found in the

collections of the early anthologists. Much such material was spurious. The *Musnad* of al-Khwārizmī may be included in this class.

V. According to some authorities,²³⁶ there exists a fifth category of *ḥadīth* works, which contain such traditions as are declared by the Muslim doctors to be unreliable or definitely forged.

SOME SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE LITERATURE

EVERY type of literature develops certain features keyed to its particular nature and content, the character of the people who cultivate it, and the distinctive social, political or historical conditions in which it originates and flourishes. *Ḥadīth* literature is no exception to this rule. Its hero, the Prophet of Islam, and the movement launched by him, captured the attention of all the people of Arabia, friends and enemies alike. His actions and words were minutely observed: his opponents made use of them in their planning, while his supporters attempted to emulate him scrupulously in everything he did and said.

This intense interest did not cease upon his death; in fact, it intensified. When it was no longer possible to ask the Prophet about questions of religion, spiritual effort, and the moral life, the Muslims were obliged to turn either to the Qur'ān, which they had intact, or, where no detailed guidance was identified in the Sacred Book, to their recollections of the teachings of the Prophet. The capacious memories of the Arabs, which had already proved their worth in preserving the ancient poetry of their people, were now pressed into the service of the new revelation, to preserve for posterity the teachings of the Messenger who had 'brought them out of the shadows into light'. The present chapter describes some of the more remarkable features of this endeavour.

5.1 THE ISNĀD SYSTEM

Each tradition found in every *ḥadīth* collection until the third century of the *hijra* includes the chain of the narrators who transmitted it—from the Prophet, a Companion, or a Follower, down to the compiler himself. The

traditionists called this chain an *isnād*, or 'authority'. They attached great importance to it, and considered it an indispensable part of every tradition. In order to ascertain the relative value of the various *isnāds* and their different classes, they produced a vast literature on the biographies of the transmitters and developed a system which was almost scientific in its precision and rigour.¹

Recent European scholars have regularly attempted to discover the origins of the *isnād* system, but without reaching any very consistent results. Leone Caetani² and Joseph Horovitz³ were the first European orientalist to address this problem.⁴ Caetani, writing in an age of chauvinism, was convinced that the *isnād* could not have originated among the Arabs. The wild desolation of the Arabian steppe, and the restive character of the primitive, ignorant, uncivilised and Semitic Arabs were not congenial to the development of a rigorous scholarly tradition.⁵ But even if the theory of Caetani, based squarely on prejudice rather than fact, were acceptable, it would only prove that the system of *isnād* did not originate with the Arabs. From whom, then, did it emanate? The Italian orientalist does not give an example of its use by any other people.

David Margoliouth, in his series of lectures on the Arab historians, only remarks, *en passant*, that the Greeks and Romans rarely used anything akin to the *isnād* system.⁶

Horovitz goes slightly further. Giving several instances from Jewish literature, he successfully demonstrates that the *isnād* was known to the Jews before the Arabs. He also endeavours to show that its use in Jewish literature can be traced back 'as early as the Mosaic period, and by Talmudic times its chain assumed enormous length, the subject-matter being of the most varied nature.'⁷

The main conclusions, however, of Horovitz's minute researches, had already been dealt with by the widely-read Ibn Ḥazm of Spain (364-456/994-1064).⁸ Describing in detail the various forms of transmission from the Prophet to later generations, he identifies six categories of transmission:

- (i) Transmission from the Prophet to future generations through an overwhelming number of persons, Muslims and non-Muslims of every generation, by parallel narration, without any difference of opinion between them.
- (ii) Unanimous transmission by all learned Muslims of every generation since the time of the Prophet.
- (iii) Transmission from the Prophet by reliable persons of known identity and established reliability of every generation, each of them stating the name of his authority.

(iv) Transmission by any one of the three classes of transmitters just mentioned, not from the Prophet, but from a person belonging to the generation following him, the earliest transmitter being silent about the source of his information.

(v) Transmission by any of the various classes of persons mentioned above, from the Prophet himself, but having in the chain of narrators a person who is known either to be a liar, or careless in his statements, or whose reliability has been questioned.

(vi) Transmission by a chain of transmitters similar to that of the first three classes, but stopping either at a Companion or a Follower, or at any Imam after them, who did not make any reference to the Prophet in his statement.

After dealing with these classes of transmission, some of which overlap with each other to some extent, Ibn Ḥazm makes some remarks about their use by the Christians and the Jews. He states that the first three classes of transmission are entirely absent from Christian as well as Jewish literature. According to him, these two religions are based on the Torah and the New Testament; and the *isnād* of the former does not go back to Moses, but rather stops short of him by many generations, while the latter is ultimately based on the testimony of five persons, the reliability, and even the identity, of whom has been questioned. The first three classes of *isnād*, Ibn Ḥazm says, are a unique feature of Islamic literature. The last three classes, however, are, according to him, found in Christian as well as in Jewish literature. The first (iv above) is particularly frequent in Jewish literature; whereas only one example of it (viz. the law relating to the impermissibility of divorce) is to be found in Christian literature. The last two classes of *isnād*, he observes, are found abundantly among the Christians and the Jews. He also cites certain details of the differences between the forms of transmission found in Islamic literature, and those used by the Christians and the Jews.

It is interesting to note further that an *isnād* system was used by the Indians long before Islam.⁹ An occasional use, for instance, can be found in ancient Hindu, Buddhist and Jain literature. In the great epic, the *Mahabharata*, we read: 'Vysda composed it, Ganesa served as a scribe, and the work was handed down by Vaisampayana, who communicated it to the king Janamejaya. Sauti, who was present at the time, heard it and narrated it to the assembly of sages.'¹⁰ The *Purāṇas* also contain some short *isnāds* of this type. The *Sūtras* (exegetical works on Vedic literature) contain brief chains mentioning some of the transmitters through whom they have been handed down. In the *Sāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka*¹¹ and the *Bṛhadā-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*¹² long lines of successive teachers of the text are given. In the first case,

we get a list of eighteen teachers, while in the latter, the longest of several lists contains twenty-seven names.

In early Buddhist literature, no chain or authorities is attached. The text is almost always introduced with the common formula: 'Thus I heard, once the lord sojourned at . . .'.¹³ But in the later literature, long chains of transmitters are frequent—particularly in such Sanskrit-Buddhist texts as are preserved in Tibetan translation. The colophon of the *Sadanga-yoga*, for example, contains the following sequential chain of narrators:

Buddha Vajradhara: Nagarjuna: Nagabodhi: Aryadeva:
Chandrakirti: Sakyarakṣita: Ratnamitra: Dharmabhadra:
Gunamati: Manjusriyana: Amoghasri: Viramati: Vijayakirti:
Varaprajñadhar-mabhadra: Śribhadra: Dharmapala:
Sakyadhara: Vagisvarakirti: Ratnakirti: Vanaratna:
Dharmabuddhi.

We are also told that the last mentioned of these transmitters, who came from Eastern India, translated the text from Sanskrit into Tibetan, by order of the master of Ron, with the assistance of a Tibetan scholar from Stag-tshan (Tibet).¹⁴

However this may be, a question more important than the originality of the *isnād* system is that of determining the time when it first began to be applied to *ḥadīth*. Caetani again holds that al-Zuhri (d.124/741) was the first to do this, and that it was further developed by his pupils, including Mūsā ibn 'Uqba (d.141/757) and Ibn Ishāq (d.151/678). According to Caetani, then, the institution was first developed in Islam during the first half of the second century AH.¹⁵ On the other hand, Horowitz is of the opinion that the first appearance of *isnāds* was not later than the last third of the first Muslim century.¹⁶ After adducing a series of facts to demonstrate this theory, he says: 'Isnād in its primitive form was then—somewhere about the year 75AH—already established, and one has no right, merely because it appears only incidentally in the letters, to deny to Urwa¹⁷ without further consideration, those *ahādīth* supplied with statements of authorities for which he stands as sponsor . . . Isnād was, indeed, already customary in his [Urwa's] time, but it was not yet an absolute necessity.'¹⁸

Joseph Schacht, however, contests this judgement, and suggests that there is no reason to suppose that the regular practice of using *isnāds* is older than the beginning of the second century AH.¹⁹ Although he quotes the well-known remark of Ibn Sirin about the beginning of the *isnād* institution: 'People used not to ask about *isnāds*, but when the civil war (*fitna*) occurred, they began to say: "Name your narrators!"'²⁰ he interprets the word *fitna* as

a reference to the civil war which began with the killing of the Umayyad caliph Walīd ibn Yazīd in 126AH.²¹ Taking into consideration the date of Ibn Sīrīn's death (110AH), Schacht regards the remark attributed to him as spurious. Yet Robson disagrees, pointing out that his interpretation of the term *fitna* here is arbitrary: it could refer to almost any of the earlier periods of confusion, and is most likely to denote the struggle between 'Alī and Mu'āwīya.²² Robson goes on to conclude that it is during the middle of the first century of Islam that one could first expect to discern anything resembling an *isnād*.²³ He is followed in this verdict by Abbott, who presents a substantial body of evidence, backed up with recently unearthed papyrus material, to show that *isnāds* were in use at this time.²⁴

This debate among Western scholars does little more than confirm that the problem of assigning a definite date to the first appearance of the *isnād* defies easy resolution. There is no doubt, none the less, that the period fixed for this by Horovitz, Robson and Abbott is very close to what is claimed by the early traditionists themselves. Ibn Sīrīn, in the account disputed by Schacht, is reported to have said that at first, people did not enquire about *isnāds*, but since the Sedition (*fitna*), they began to ask for it. The *fitna* here is claimed by Muslims (and, as we have seen, Robson) to refer to the civil war between 'Alī and Mu'āwīya, which erupted in the year 35AH; an event which is conventionally referred to by this term. But there are other indications, which, if genuine, would suggest an even earlier provenance. 'Alī himself is reported to have advised students: 'When you write down a narration, write it with the *isnād*.'²⁵ We likewise find reports of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī, himself a Companion, transmitting *ḥadīths* from the Prophet not directly but via Abū Hurayra.²⁶ And, as Azami has pointed out, it was only natural that the Companions,

in informing their colleagues, would have used sentences like 'The Prophet did so and so' or 'The Prophet said so and so'. It is also natural that anyone gaining information at second-hand, when reporting the incident to a third man, would disclose his sources of information and give a full account of the incident.²⁷

From these facts, and from the intense caution with which the important Companions treated the memory of the Prophet, it may legitimately be inferred that the system of *isnād* was considered a necessary part of *ḥadīth* well before the century was out.

But whenever it originated, there is no doubt that having adopted the system, the Muslims came to consider the *isnād* as an indispensable part of the *ḥadīths*. They developed it, and gave it a firm foundation by introducing